THE SPHYNX; OR, ISHMAEL'S SCHOLARSHIP IN *MOBY-DICK; OR, THE WHALE*

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ABSTRACT

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Title: The Sphynx; or, Ishmael's Scholarship in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*

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Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is, in some sense, a work of art composed of two distinct books—distinct, but the one means nothing with the other. *Moby-Dick* is a drama, and *The Whale* a monograph; the *or* does not distinguish alternative titles (synonyms), but rather a particular recourse to conjunction, to movement between alternative, though specific, forms of literary composition as a way to express experience. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in "The American Scholar," addressed fourteen years before the composition of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* these very sort of movements between experience, scholarship and poetry: Ishmael, who Melville authored as an author of the book, is as much a scholar as he is a poet. *The Whale* is his scholarly work (cetology, commercial histories, arcana, art criticism, among others), a part of the book that has not, moreover, attracted much attention in critical studies of *Moby-Dick* since the 1920s, when Melville studies really began to take form. Ishmael's scholarship is usually typified as either useful contextualization (a "ballast" necessary for a reader's understanding of *Moby-Dick*) or else Melvillean extravagance. Literary critics usually privilege story of Ahab and the *Pequod*, i.e. those parts that make up *Moby-Dick* in the understanding of Melville's book as two, over its counterpart, *The Whale*.

The argument here seeks to undo the rigidity of that critical approach in order to read any particular part of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* on its own terms. In so doing, I attempt to elaborate and develop Emerson's notion of scholarship, as well as Melville's adaptations of Emerson's theory of scholarly expression, using both Melville's writing at the time of *Moby-Dick*'s composition (his letters and "Hawthorne and His Mosses") and Ishmael's (performative) example in the book itself. Scholarship, on these terms, is highly creative poetic, intuitive, and above all personal; and, still, it is rigorous, self-critical, and conscious of an internal logic. Part of my argument is a performance of this notion of scholarship, namely, taking up a creative and personal style that motivates the evolution of this argument through interrogations of the figures of the Lamp-Light and the Tattoo in the book. I argue for, in other words, a renewal of Emerson's demands for American scholarship—the need for creative reading (finding the links between literature and everyday life) and for creative writing about those experiences of creative reading.

Epigraph

It was a black and hooded head, and hanging there in the midst of so intense a calm, it seemed the Sphynx's in the desert. "Speak, thou vast and venerable head," muttered Ahab, "which, though ungarnished with a beard, yet here and there lookest hoary with mosses; speak, mighty head, and tell us the secret thing that is in thee. Of all divers, thou hast dived the deepest. That head upon which the upper sun now gleams, has moved amid this world's foundations. Where unrecorded names and navies rust, and untold hopes and anchors rot; where in her murderous hold this frigate earth is ballasted with bones of millions of the drowned; there, in that awful water-land, there was thy most familiar home. Thou hast been where bell or diver never went; hast slept by many a sailor's side, where sleepless mothers would give their lives to lay them down. Thou saw'st the locked lovers when leaping from their flaming ship; heart to heart they sank beneath the exulting wave; true to each other, when heaven seemed false to them. Thou saw'st the murdered mate when tossed by pirates from the midnight deck; for hours he fell into the deeper midnight of the insatiate maw; and his murderers still sailed on unharmed—while shift lightnings shivered the neighboring ship that would have borne a righteous husband to outstretched, longing arms. Oh head! thou hast seen enough to split the planets and make an infidel of Abraham, and not one syllable is thine!"

"Sail ho!" cried a triumphant voice from the main-mast-head.

"Aye? Well, now, that's cheering," cried Ahab, suddenly erecting himself, while whole thunder-clouds swept aside from his brow. "That lively cry upon this deadly calm might almost convert a better man.—Where away?"

"Three points on the starboard bow, sir, and bringing down her breeze to us!"

"Better and better, man. Would now St. Paul would come along that way, and to my breezelessness bring his breeze! O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs or lives in matter, but has its cunning duplicate in the mind."

—Ahab, to decapitated head of a Sperm Whale, "The Sphynx"

Acknowledgements. *Midnight, Forecastle.*

The crew of *The Pequod* dances, sings, talks after Ahab reveals to the men the true purpose of their voyage. Ahab, enraged by vengeance, sparks in the crew a similar madness and determination—they share the job, in Ahab's mind, of exterminating brute malice from the world. The crew at midnight, after drinking from the pewter, in a certain sense celebrate the bonds of a common labor that is not just Ahab's mandate, but the cooperative labor of a three or four years voyage without ever setting foot on land.

I have only spent something like a year with *The Whale,* I have not carried with me the mad, violent motivations of Ahab, and I have easily stepped between land and sea, spending moments away (on land) from my project (at sea). Nevertheless, I have spent many hours at an imaginary forecastle talking about *The Whale*, looking for comments and fruitful suggestions. I owe much to these conversations, which, like those at all hours on the *Pequod*, speak to the common labor of scholarship and also to the encouragement of my more specific scholarly pursuits. Without these conversations the project I have now would not be what is. I want to thank, here, those with which I have had these conversations:

Professor Evan Carton, for helping to give much of this project its direction in our weekly conversations; for first suggesting the work of Emerson to organize the framework of my project, and the vocabulary of "recourse to conjunction" and "transubstantiation"; and for, most of all, encouraging my inclination to be creative with my scholarship and write the thing how I wanted to write it.

Professor James Cox, for consistent encouragement and support, as well as always helpful critical commentary, in addition to a common enthusiasm for *Moby-Dick.*

Professor George Christian, for encouraging me in the early stages in this project to be honest to my desire for creativity.

Professor Sam Baker, for pointing me to useful deployment of media theory for the lamp-light chapter; for mentioning the Atlantic connections between English and American 19th-century literature; and for first suggesting the idea of a glossary.

Brad King, for originally opening up this theme of making literature relevant in and real for the present; in this way he encouraged intimate reading and intimate writing, without which this project would never have had been possible.

The English Department at the University of Texas, for its genuine support and providing the resources that made my scholarly labors possible materially. The Department covered, at least, the last two of Ishmael's exclamation, "Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience!" I want to specifically thank Brad Humphries for being always a helpful point of contact with the department.

Finally, to my family, for great and unconditional support even as I elaborated a strange project about an even stranger book.

But,

> MATE'S VOICE FROM THE QUARTER DECK.
>
> Hands by the halyards! in top-gallant sails! Stand by to reef topsails!
>
> ALL.
>
> The squall! the squall! jump, my jollies! (*They scatter.*)

—*Midnight, Forecastle* (end of scene).

Table of Contents

I. Preface. *Before the Chase: on Land; an Affidavit; the First Lowering*.

Ishmael is among the first of the Emersonian American Scholars. Ishmael probably did not hear Emerson speak to the members of Phi Betta Kappa chapter at Harvard in 1837, but he felt forever afterwards the vibrations of Emerson's demands for the flowering of a free and spontaneous American scholarship, never until that point actualized by the men of letters in the young country. Emerson addressed a want of labor,[1] something not yet come into existence, so for the listeners he mounts an exposition of what is to be done. Emerson's construction is one that in the first place belongs to an individual –*the scholar*–, and secondarily –but also necessarily– to a general, collective project of knowledge and scholarship.[2] He chose "The American Scholar" over "American Scholarship" for a purpose. The latter sounded too much like the already existing institution, too mired in the status quo of contemporary practices of *imitation* and the inertia of complacent conformism. Emerson rather starts with the original life of the individual, from which knowledge and truth come into the world. The latter characterizes the labor of the scholar: "the delegated intellect" in the regime of "One Man," the whole constituted by all men.[3] The scholar, should he properly labor in tune with the activity of his own soul, trusting himself,[4] becomes *Man Thinking*.[5]

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[1] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *"The American Scholar" Today: Emerson's Essay and Some Critical Views*, ed. David Mead (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1970), 13.

[2] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 23.

[3] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 14.

[4] Every duty of the scholar may be interpreted in terms of "self-trust." Cf. Emerson, "The American Scholar," 22, 24-25.

[5] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 14.

The body is the site of the scholar's labor. Here begins the turning and perpetuation of a finally conscious circuit between man and the world. The scholar finds in the world "a law which is also a law of the human mind."[6] The interior and the exterior come together in organic unison, so to interrogate the one is to interrogate the other, although the two continue to be real and separate categories. Action, experience in the world, is, then, the method of the scholar for beginning to know himself and the world, and later to relate a truth about the two.[7] The scholar acts in order to give life to thought, animate knowledge, resuscitate commentary; he rearranges experience in order to produce a truth. Those rearrangements are consequently a method rooted in the life of the scholar. Subordinated to experience, books are another instrument of the scholar. They are "for nothing but to inspire."[8] The scholar must read creatively, in some sense invent[9] an experience of reading other than simple, static listening: "when the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion."[10] Scholarship to an Emersonian scholar is a purposeful act of a simultaneously personal and universal valence. From the depths of the scholar's most profoundly felt personal, creative compulsions, the scholar articulates his truth, a truth inevitably one for himself and knowledge in general.

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[6] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 15. Down the page he writes: "—when he has learned to worship the soul, and to see that the natural philosophy that now is, is only the first gropings of its gigantic head, he shall look forward to an ever expanding knowledge as to a becoming creator."

[7] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 17, 19.

[8] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 17.

[9] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 18.

[10] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 18.

The argument that will follow through the length of this essay –outlined at its most general and comprehensive level here– at first divides Melville's whale book into two in order to facilitate a purposeful apprehension of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* as an authentic scholarly effort on the part of Ishmael as he, at the same time, composes a work of art. (The conclusions of my arguments will see to the eventual disintegration of this division and an understanding of the whale book as a literary *gestalt*.) I split the title into two, along its conjunctive axis, *or,* and the two parts of the whole are in their crudest forms a tragedy and a monograph. I call the one *Moby-Dick* and the other *The Whale*; I can go about separating the two more or less along the borders of chapters depending on subject matter, and even where there are hybrids there are usually internal divisions in any such chapter that set apart the two lines of development. *Moby-Dick* is the Pequod, it is Ahab, the story of an inexperienced Ishmael for the first time gone a-whaling, the comedy on land and the tragedy at sea. *The Whale* is another invention. The first pages of the book are pages out of *The Whale*; the text of *The Whale* is extracts, etymologies, arcana, commercial and industrial descriptions, and not least cetology, among others. In the end there are modes of composition that lie somewhere in between, at the edges and left out of my crude grouping of chapters, but these work towards the whole—they are fragments in the moment of abstraction, feeling for the lines of *OR* that marry the one to the other, *Moby-Dick* to *The Whale*.[11]

Without the *OR* Ishmael may have been another Pip or else Coleridge's Ancient Mariner,[12] too caught up in the obsessive circuits of traumatic stress. The *OR* permits Ishmael

[11] cf. Walter E. Bezanson, "*Moby-Dick*: Work of Art," in *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 653-654. He concludes that "there are definable relations between any given chapter and some other chapter or chapters; and these relations tend to be multiple and shifting."

[12] cf. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, in Seven Parts," in *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800*, ed. Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Editions, 2008), 49-72.

a freedom to treat the tragedy (*Moby-Dick*) without, at the moment (in *The Whale*), referring directly to it. The conjunction usually marks a possible synonym, a simple alternative for the title of the book, but the transition here from one title to another –*Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*– is not the movement of substitution. Each title has some content of its own which the other does not cover. So it is that the *OR* has a more important function for the text of Melville's whale book.[13]

My interest is with *The Whale*. Melville studies of course have not passed over the unique encyclopedic role of this internal sub-book.[14] But its chapters seem cumbersome, uselessly obsessive, the long-winded digressions of a former schoolmaster. A casual reader at best skims through Ishmael's cetological studies, or occasionally appreciates his scientific parody, may even listen to the routine going-ons particular to a whale ship in order to get an idea of the industry. The critic, the literary scholar, approaches *The Whale* with more sophistication, but not much more: the interminable cataloging and exegesis of whale arcana are only the ramblings of an obsessed scholar, or Melville's work to contextualize the other, more important part, *Moby-Dick*.[15] I avoid that critical privilege and approach the book in its

[13] Melville, something like a year before he published his sixth book under two separate titles (one in England and the other in America), wrote an anonymous literary critical essay on one of Nathaniel Hawthorne's earlier books, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, advising the reader not to let the titles of the stories provoke any anticipation of its content: "that they," the readers tempted to read Hawthorne's book by the Virginian spending July in Vermont, "must on no account suffer themselves to be trifled with, disappointed, or deceived by the triviality of many of the titles to these Sketches. For in more than one instance, the title utterly belies the piece," Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," in *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 529. Melville had not yet titled the book in 1850; he referred to it as his whale book to Dana and later as The White Whale to Hawthorne. A year later the notion is oddly self-reflexive.

[14] The prefix here has a double meaning: first (the more obvious nuance), "sub-" in the sense of hierarchical organization, as on a document with sections and *sub*sections; and second, a reference to position, i.e. underneath, below, as a *sub*marine. I keep both in mind: *The Whale* comes under *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, and the whale moves beneath the surface of the water.

[15] cf. Betsy Hilbert, "The Truth of the Thing: Nonfiction in *Moby-Dick*," *College English* 48.8 (December 1986): 824-831; Samuel Otter, "An Aesthetics in All Things," *Representations* 104.1 (Fall 2008): 116-125. The title page of the Norton Critical Edition of *Moby-Dick* does not include Melville's full title, but only *Moby-Dick*. It is

"broad genera" rather than the specific account of events.[16] I read Ishmael's scholarship–which precedes the drama–and I make no evaluation of the power or significance of one book over the other. I argue, rather, that an interrogation of the scholarly effort of *The Whale* is in the first place essential in order to apprehend Ishmael and his experience: *The Whale* makes *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* possible. It is, in the end, impossible to shrug off the bulky blubber of *The Whale*, for it is that blubber that renders the light by which Ishmael writes his drama of the White Whale. These "thick walls," too, carry their own naturally scored mysteries, hieroglyphics "as if they were engraved upon the body itself"—signs and secrets of some cosmic sort that impel Ishmael to research.[17] The aim of my project is to understand the nature of Ishmael's scholarly intimacy with the whale.

It is an argument provoked, originally, by a reader's recognition of the generic multiplicity of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. It is at the same time a very odd book and a very personal one for both Ishmael and Melville. Scholarship in the mode of Emerson holds the key to this personality, hence the book's multiplicity is a function of its scholarship (another expression of the *OR*, i.e. mode-switching; recourse to conjunction). Scholarship armed with multiplicity directed by personality has no foreseeable end: Ishmael knows he cannot develop absolute knowledge but only approach a limit set by action and experience. It is similar to light penetrating the surface of water: it spreads along distinct directions and each ray thins, attenuating as the distance increases, where the scholar cannot live. Coincidentally, here, far beneath the surface, the whale swims and towards him Ishmael and Melville dive deep. They

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an editorial decision that, probably unconsciously, reproduces the critical privilege of particular parts of the book over others.

[16] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 115.

[17] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 246.

both have recourse only to conjunction (the *OR*), or in other words a series of interrogations carried out through alternative methods (genres) that produce their own distinct content.

Scholarship, this activity described as the evolution of a collection of light rays, is as such a general form rather than the narrow formulation we are familiar with in the academy. The form and method according to Emerson include two basic activities, creative reading and creative writing,[18] which are clearly endless tasks.[19] Completion is always already deferred to some later point, or more exactly, a series of later points that escape the interrogator.[20] A well cited paragraph of chapter 32, "Cetology," is the one that refers back to this progressive deferral:

> Finally: It was stated at the outset, that this system would not be here, and at once, perfected. You cannot but plainly see that I have kept my word. But I now leave my cetological System standing thus unfinished, even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever completing anything. This whole book is but a draught—nay, but the draught of a draught. Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience![21]

The "draught of a draught" coalesces to any distinct mode as Ishmael sees fit, exercising the breadth of inscription, in order to produce some knowledge about the world. *The Whale* is a very concrete and physical scholarly work, and finally one the reader expects to go down unfinished because the of nature of Ishmael's difficult and groping investigations of the whale who swims beneath the surface, protected from man's experience of him as he truly exists—*beneath the surface*.

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[18] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 18: "There is then creative reading as well as creative writing." Cf. *creativity* in the Glossary, pp. 9.

[19] Melville writes in "Hawthorne and His Mosses," "Once more—for it is hard to be finite upon an infinite subject, and all subjects are infinite," 532.

[20] cf. Rodolphe Gasché, "The Scene of Writing: A Deferred Outset," *Glyph: John Hopkins Textual Studies* 1 (1977): 150-171.

[21] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 124-125.

Moby-Dick; or, The Whale must share Ishmael's logic of deferral. That logic, which is fundamentally a specific logic of composition, without doubt characterizes *The Whale* as concrete scholarship, but in *Moby-Dick* one only catches glimpses here and there of a reflexive and circular deferral. The logic of deferral in *Moby-Dick* is, after all, the logic of hunting the White Whale, and every episode of the latter reveals something of the nature of the book's structural commitment to deferral. The capture of Moby Dick is always deferred by the sheer force of his resistance (a resistance that represents multiple acts of resistance), and the patterns of non-capture, though they seem linear to the whaler (the legend organized by attempts to capture ordered according to linear, clock time), are really circular, as Emerson expected.[22] The pattern is a piling up of distinct violent disasters that are really the same disaster repeated over and over again: Ishmael spins around like Ixion and Moby Dick swims always to the lee, along the circumference of the world.

The *OR* axis, in other words, signals a switching of modes but not any alteration to the basic methods of Emersonian scholarship, among which is sketched the logic of deferral. Though a Poet[23] speaks in *Moby-Dick* and a Scholar speaks in *The Whale*, the two share the same theory *of* and purpose *for* expression: the rearrangement of experience –of a book or of the world– into truth. Scholarship and Poetry, the meaning of those terms already saturated

[22] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 15, "There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find,—so entire, so boundless."

[23] Emerson refers to the scholar, the poet, and the orator all in the same breath: "He [the scholar] then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind he has descended into the secrets of all minds. He learns that he who has mastered any law in his private thoughts, is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated. The poet, in utter solitude remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded that which men in crowded cities find true for them also. The orator distrusts at first the fitness of his frank confessions, his want of knowledge of the persons he addresses, until he finds that he is the complement of his hearers;—that they drink his words because he fulfils for them their own nature; the deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true." Emerson, "The American Scholar," 23-24.

with broader significations, come under one title: *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. The profound personality of Melville's whale book compels many, and the strangeness of the thing is deeply necessary to that magnetism—"the people delight in it; the better part of every man feels. This is my music; this is myself."[24] *The Whale* is fundamental to the book as a strange work of art: it is the subject of my study.

[24] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 24.

II. Glossary. *The Ballast; the Chart.*

The set of terms defined and listed below are integral to my reading of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. The terms describe the conceptual movement between experience and commentary, though in different and specific ways.

Conjunction—(1) a joining or union of distinct elements (2) the part of language that acts as a connective element between distinct phrases in a sentence in order to express a particular relation. Conjunction is the mechanism at work in the *OR* axis (cf. Preface).

Creativity—a denser term than in contemporary usage (imagination, expressiveness, an ability to work out problems in an original way, i.e. *creative*), in the sense that the term refers to creation, the product of labor (a nuance more relevant in 19th century usage); both meanings of the word are, here, understood to be twisted together. The work of the scholar is both productive and poetic (cf. Preface; Cartography).

Deferral—a withholding or postponement of some event or action, usually a final one. Deferral is an intrinsic feature of Ishmael's cetological scholarship ('draft of a draft'); the term is represented by the figure of the cathedral of Cologne (cf. Preface).

Incorporation—the process of taking something that is outside into the body (the inside), whether or not the thing is a fact/object in the world or some immaterial concept. Ishmael's tattoo is the primary figure of the processes of incorporation; Ahab's ivory leg (and parallel madness) reveal an inability to incorporate, and an opting for dissociation[1] (cf. Tattoo; or, Hieroglyphs).

[1] Sharon Cameron, "Representing Greif: Emerson's 'Experience,'" in *Impersonality: Seven Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 53-78.

Mode-switching—the term is inspired by the linguistic concept of code-switching (the organized and strategic transitions between two or more different languages); it refers to the transition between fundamentally unprivileged modes or registers of speech, unprivileged because each mode sustains a particular approach and purpose different from the others (there can be no comparison of relative utility). Mode-switching is another basic feature of Ishmaels' method (cf. Cartography).

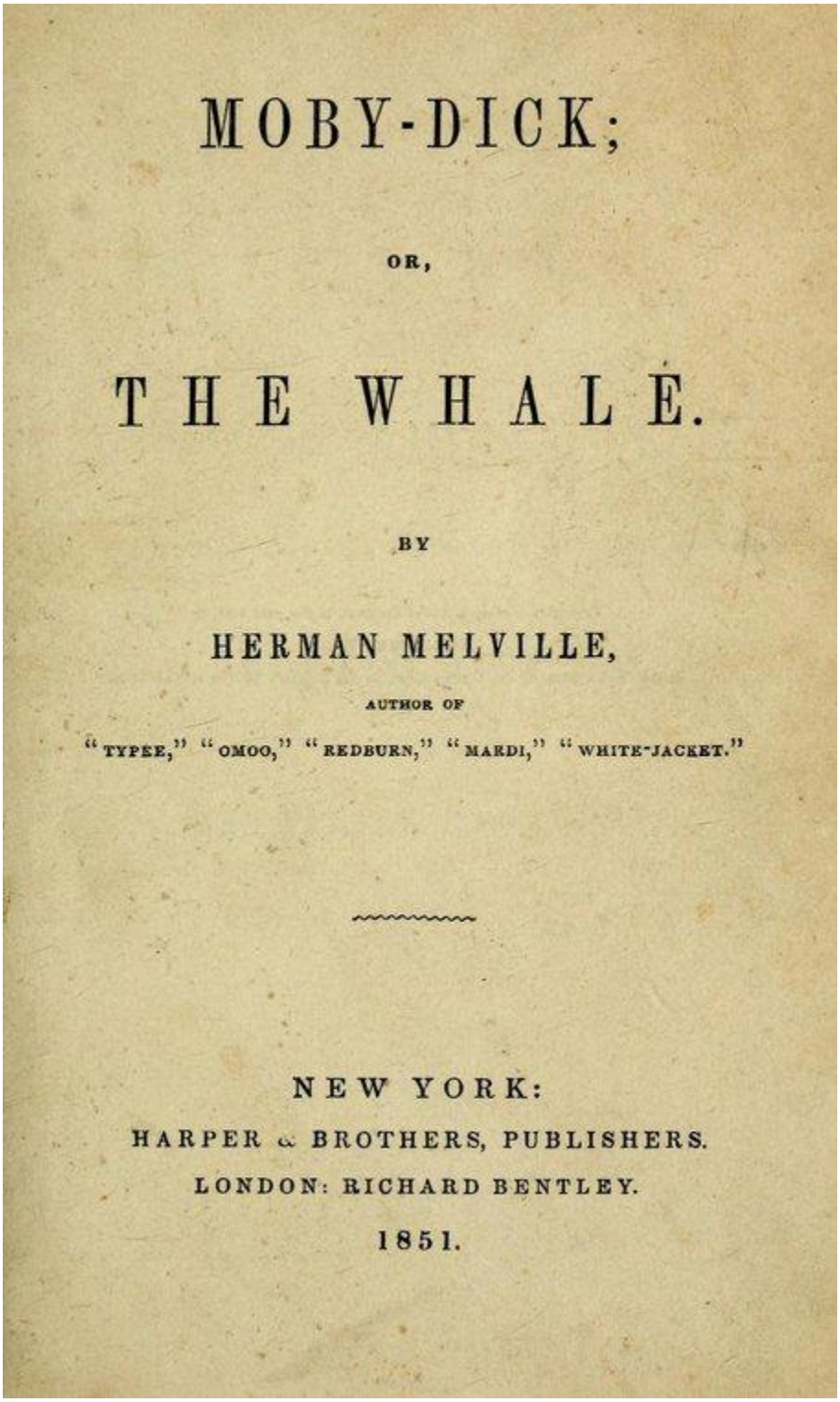
Poetry—made of a structure similar to that of scholarship (at the foundation, there is no distinction of relative literariness); attempts to elucidate some truth consistent for the inside (interior, the individual mind) and the outside (exterior, the world); not reducible to any particular formula (cf. *Scholarship*; Preface; Cartography; Emerson's "The American Scholar" and "The Poet"; Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads 1800*).[2]

Scholarship—the product of the scholar who fulfills the function of *Man Thinking* for the *Whole Man*, hence an intensely personal labor/activity that is at the same time a collective one; expresses a truth the scholar has found in his researches; nature, books, and action (experience) are the influences of the scholar, and all of his "duties" are reducible to self-trust; fundamentally scholarship is the labor aimed at maintaining a commentary about experience (cf. *Poetry*; Preface).

Transubstantiation—the processes whereby one substance is transformed into another, though it keeps the form of the original substance; here, the process of transubstantiation is characterized by the passing of a unique substance (whale substance) that is abstract, but may congeal materially and bodily; the whale substance is the agent of transubstantiation, and it is free to transform concrete objects whenever some part of

[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," in Nature *and Selected Essays*, ed. Larzer Ziff (New York: Penguin, 2003), 259-284; William Wordsworth, "Preface," in *Lyrical Ballads1798 and 1800*, 171-187.

the whale is consumed. The lamp-light is a figure of this process, i.e. the whale ↔ *The Whale*, a process facilitated by the consumption of the whale's oil (cf. Lamp-Light).



MOBY-DICK;

OR,

THE WHALE.

BY

HERMAN MELVILLE,

AUTHOR OF

"TYPEE," "OMOO," "REDBURN," "MARDI," "WHITE-JACKET."

NEW YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS.

LONDON: RICHARD BENTLEY.

1851.

III. Note on Style. *Loomings*.

I want to read literature in the present, bring it down to size, approach my own experience. All Ishmael has left is to write: he goes a-whaling, like the Blacksmith, because he thinks that better than killing himself. But he is caught up in an experience impossibly set to words: he is weekly pulled in circles above the wreckage of the *Pequod*, at the edge of a dissipating vortex. He survives the inadvertent murder of an entire crew of some thirty men, a traumatized orphan whom *Rachel* comes upon, a sad substitute for a lost twelve year-old son. He cannot avoid his memory of the tragedy, cannot blot it out: he has to chase yet another whale. Trauma, suicide's frequent parent, sent Ishmael a-writing. Only the second time he chases *The Whale*.

All of this, this project, coincides with my third reading of the book. I keep reading notes and annotations in a black-marbled composition book, and there I wrote sometime last July (2016), "Moby-Dick," and "the Third Day" under it as a sort of title page to mark a new section. I had only a few days before returned to Texas after a few months in Spain, the country which closes another sea the Sperm Whale occasionally visits. There was probably the closest I have ever been to a Sperm Whale. But *Moby-Dick* was not exactly on my mind; *The Whale*, for a time, disappeared, swam at profounder depths while I was only trying to speak another language.

American ground, though, resuscitated my attention (19th century American literature always, in my mind, mounted an idea of the United States that even now, however corrupted, we cannot shake—it weighs, like the whale, too heavily, and often we like the pressure). I started the book for a third reading sometime near the end of July, and, somewhat like Ahab, I have been chasing *The Whale* for a third time. I chase, however, without Ahab's impetuosity

nor, I hope, pride. I am not trying to strike through a mask or get at some hidden vitality that I may subordinate with reading or a hempen line of letters and words attached to an inked harpoon. I chase more obliquely. For Ishmael the chase apparently never stops; a monomaniacal project to brutishly subordinate a living thing only ends in disaster, a disaster the whale undeniably escapes. I work in Ishmael's fashion, though even he barely escapes death. The weight of his trauma discourages another attempt to harpoon the fish, kill him, and analyze above the water. That is impossible, *if* he wants any real idea of the whale. Ishmael's cetological scholarship is incredibly problematic: he does not want to kill, but still he cannot dive below the surface of the water.

Ishmael knows it, so he is forced to waver between scholarly modes—whether metaphysical, scientific, or the one that keeps Ishmael from taking himself seriously. His form – the way he composes at any point –, though disparate and fragmentary, always nevertheless refers back to the story of the *Pequod*, at whose borders are the cetological and encyclopedic chapters. Chapter numbers and titles divide scholarship from drama, tragedy from cetology, often without obvious motive. The divisions are arbitrary and lack transition from one sort of writing to another; the titles of the book, however, force one to read both sorts as intrinsic to a dichotomous whole. *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is a single thing, a unique book, so chapter divisions cannot in the end justify any intuition to separate the novel into two, haphazardly glued together like a mosaic. Experience binds the two together, *Moby-Dick* being experience's clear articulation and *The Whale* being a commentary (always referential) upon and argument from experience.

Ishmael's chase does not stop after the Third Day. The chase after Moby Dick only sets him up to spin in circles, orphaned in an open, horrible immensity, surrounded by nothing but

the flat ocean waters of a stepmother world. The disaster, though, does not keep him from the whale, only he somewhat changes course, sets out to deploy another, alternatively structured method of "whaling." Ahab's method of chase failed, so Ishmael had to alter the terms of that method. *The Whale* is, in some ways, a work of alteration and amendment. Ahab's experience provoked his manner of chase, detailed from the quarter-deck and later under the corposants. Ahab wants revenge. Ishmael's experience required a different mode of articulation, a different mode of poetics adapted to his individual experience, because he, in the end, wants to make sense of the tragedy. But first he had to make sense of the whale. The grip of Ahab's poetry upon Ishmael's mind unravels more and more with each revolution around the sunken wreckage of the *Pequod*. *The Whale* spins another poetry from the uncoiled yarn of disaster.

I said earlier I follow in Ishmael's fashion. But I do not dress up as him. At the end of the "third day" of reading, only, I find myself alone and spinning; *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* gets away, however strong and excited the chase. Really, when I say I follow the meditative whale-man's fashion, I mean only that experience is the point at which I can in some way catch myself, keeping my head from spinning even as the book pulls me in circles. And, to be explicit, I mean the experience of reading. I have been on a boat, but I have never been at sea, "before the mast" as the saying goes. I will probably never actually experience the precarity a of whale ship alone at sea, sailing along the equator, and surely never skid around in a thinly planked boat dragged by whale. My type of precarity in the world is much more invisible, hidden from sight: I am just a student who buys his bottle of whale oil from a grocer's down the street. I, really, know nothing of the whaleman's exact experience of near-death as he gathers up that oil in faraway, Pacific expanses. I am only another person on the street, like

Coleridge's wedding-guest, who patiently listens to the Ancyent Mariner, half-horrified by the half-crazed man and his story.

But at least I can read. I can bring *Moby-Dick* into the present, find the ways that it is meaningful, relevant to my life as I actually live it. It is not as if the book were a guidebook for Romantic and genuinely American experience. Ishmael, as a schoolmaster, understands more of pedagogy than to try that. *The Whale* is more of an exercise of readerly reflection, of seeing the sub-book as a usable thing (beyond contextualization) inasmuch as Ishmael betrays himself reflecting upon his own experience. He is more transparent at those times he speaks metaphysically, speculating about existence and reality; at other times his reflections are piled under a mass of cetological 'data' and descriptions of the business of whaling. The latter are moments of reflection more complex because he brings inside the world that is outside. Ishmael advises: be more like the whale, model yourself like the whale. He metaphorizes whales as books in "Cetology"; he writes a book called *the Whale*; he writes a book about himself.

Moby-Dick, though, is not exactly a Song of Myself: Ishmael is too dark, has too much rigor for the New York Poet's lightheartedness. Nor is he a "Man of Letters"—Ishmael is at the helm, steering the *Pequod* and staring into the fire which burns the oil from the flesh of the Sperm Whale. He falls asleep, is turned around; he tries to wake up but he is caught in an "unnatural hallucination of the night" between dream and wakefulness. Finally roused, he turns around and catches the ship. An aching horror of death inexplicably comes and passes. Alerted, Ishmael writes:

> So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true—not true, or undeveloped. With books the same. The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe. "All is vanity." ALL. This willful world hath not got hold of unchristian Solomon's wisdom yet. But he who dodges hospitals and jails, and walks fast crossing grave-yards, and would rather talk of operas than hell…—not

> that man is fitted to sit down on tomb-stones, and break the green damp mould with unfathomably wondrous Solomon.
>
> But even Solomon, he says, "the man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain" (*i.e.* even while living) "in the congregation of the dead." Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar.[1]

Ishmael stylizes himself as the "Man of Sorrows" whose coming, the editors remind, Isaiah of the Old Testament originally prophesied. He writes as a Man of Sorrows because it is the truest thing he can do; he knows grief because he cannot, in the end, catch reality nor grip, absolutely his experience. Both are too unstable, slippery for that. The stability of his book rather comes from writing as he does—from his own experience of fragmentary realities illuminated by artificial fires and hinted at by the "truest" books. The sun at least does not hide the darker side of the world; Ishmael tries to see through the sunlight and articulate just exactly what he sees.

He has to write as he is compelled in order to give the book any life. He writes, that is, as experience directs him. He is rather clear about that in the well cited final clause of "The Advocate." The *Pequod* was the grounds of his season of "higher learning." He is being, though, a little facetious. He exaggerates. The *Pequod*'s voyage and its chase of the White Whale is of course the premise for *Moby-Dick*. *The Whale*, however, is a world of involved and obsessive research. Ishmael placed before everything else in the book an abbreviated archive compiled of Extracts and an Etymology to preface the book and elsewhere he betrays his academic erudition. Ishmael does not immediately abstract from his experience: in the intervening years he researches, which is a combination of reading (on land) and whaling (at

[1] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

sea). The books provoke thought, remediate his memories, permit him to treat his experience in manifold ways (always he comes back to Moby Dick leading a procession before his soul).

If I am to give any life to *this* project –'but a project of a project'–, I have to take Ishmael's hint. This is the reason for all this talk of "Ishmael's fashion." Of course, I am not saying anything new: everybody necessarily writes in their own style, and anybody serious inevitably does. I may seem, still, unconventional or, perhaps, to depart from the formula so often taught in introductory Literature courses to facilitate writing essays in the academy. Still, I intend to maintain a rigor comparable to Ishmael's in my own articulations of both the research I have done and the experience I have had.

"Secondary" research, here, acquires another valence of meaning: each are a secondary reading of the experience spent with the "primary" work, with *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. The secondary voices, however, are originally the labor of the same sort of primary experience with Melville's writing, and I want, too, to let these scholars speak without forcing them into the play of argument and counter-argument so frequently solicited in the classroom. It may seem heterodox, but I do not want, either, to be unfaithful to their expression. I will make myself clear when I disagree, but, like Melville, I often opt for rearrangement—permitting these scholars to speak on their own terms, as they should, while I speak for myself. Such, I think, is the appropriate spirit of reading and engagement (my argument is as much about reading as it is about writing). This heterodoxy is matched in other parts of my project: a glossary of terms (with heterodox definitions), longer than usual quotations of the primary text, and momentary incorporations of the author (usually through his letters) into that primary text. Emerson's notion of scholarship is, in some sense, an argument for heterodoxy, and *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is an extremely heterodox text; Melville and Emerson in their own words both

encourage thoughtful, critical, and reflexive scholarly expression, apart from the arguments I have made here concerning my own style. Really, I am defending my own creativity, my own scholarly intuitions about the whale.

IV. Cartography. *The First Day.*

Gams on deck; or, Gambols in Books.

Dan Beachy-Quick writes that his *Dictionary* is not exclusively directed by his years of reading *Moby-Dick*: he owes something to reading other books, subsequent gams with the ideas of other writers carried by the papery spines of books rather than the wooden keels of whale ships.[1] *A Whaler's Dictionary* is after all a reference book. Incidentally Beachy-Quick reproduces Melville's patterns, methods, logics of reading and writing from both experience and experience read about, picked-up from books.

Ishmael explains the whaler's custom in a chapter called "The Gam," and something must be "said here of the peculiar usages of whaling-vessels when meeting each other in foreign seas, and especially on a common cruising-ground" in order to understand secondary gams with books.[2] He proposes the word "be incorporated into the Lexicon," and so we let Ishmael "learnedly define it."

> GAM. NOUN—*A social meeting of two (or more) Whale-ships, generally on a cruising-ground; when, after exchanging hails, they exchange visits by boats' crews: the two captains remaining, for the time, on board of one ship, and the two chief mates on the other*.[3]

The whaler's gam is particularly social; the crew pass along stories personally experienced with, too, those told at second and third-hand, heard at previous gams. The *Pequod* meets many ships, and Ishmael has enjoyed many gams. The whale ship is propelled by gams, by the information and yarns threaded by each meeting, though Ahab's obsession prevents the *Pequod* from more sociable encounters (he only ever has one line of questioning). So it is that

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[1] Dan Beachy-Quick, *A Whaler's Dictionary*, (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2008), xv.

[2] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 196.

[3] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 198

Moby-Dick is partly a book of gams: Ahab gets nowhere without these meetings, and Moby Dick would never acquire his fame without the spread of rumor among whaling vessels.

But Beachy-Quick calls to mind a gam which is not one between ships but between readers and writers; he speaks of a sort of gam essential to his methods of creative and critical composition. He did not have to mark *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* in the list of his gams with other books, as it is obvious that his book is a gam *par excellence* with Melville's book. It is also clear that Ishmael heterodoxically organizes his writerly gams on land: the readers of *Moby-Dick* are like the incredulous Peruvians at the Golden Inn in Lima to whom Ishmael tells the Town-Ho's Story. The only problem is that his reader is probably not a whale man, so Ishmael, at risk of being long-winded, has to go further to explicate and expound upon the commercial business of whaling and the natural history of the whale, or, in other words, the assumed knowledge of a whale man (he must explain the gam at the same time he represents it).

These explanations required of Melville rather voluminous reading as well as some thought about how exactly to compose *Moby-Dick* as a work of art distinct from already existing whaler's narratives in print. Melville was conscious of a large mass of explanatory material necessary so that, from the technical side of composition, his book made any sense to a reader who knew of Sperm Whales and whaling only through spermaceti candles, oil lamps, the whale oil used as industrial lubricants, or any other variety of consumer good.[4] A contemporary reader, equipped with a glossary of nautical terms, a more technical description of mid-19th century whaling practices, and some illustrations (such as those found in the

[4] cf. Heidi Scott, "Whale Oil Culture, Consumerism, and Modern Conservation," in *Oil Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 3-18.

supplementary materials of the Norton Critical Edition of *Moby-Dick*), can still understand Melville's explanatory efforts.

These explanations, however, often gather a certain artistic or at least essayistic and literary valence. He does not simply reproduce the information he read in Beale, Scoresby and other accounts, but these technical explanations often flow with ease into the narrative, or else Ishmael runs away with some excited metaphysical thought or a satiric parody. Melville, in a word, organized his own gams with these whaling and cetological accounts that were more than a quick and simple passing of information; he found ways to make these commentaries and criticisms relevant at a personal level as he began to put together Ishmael as a character and his (Ishmael's) obsession with the Sperm Whale. But in order to accomplish this Melville had to have in mind, though maybe not absolutely and completely elaborated, some sort of theory of expression that would orient Ishmael's compositional logic and critical purposes; in other words the theory would establish a link between (reading) books and experience in the world. The second part of his theory had to account for the other important link between (writing) commentary (provoked by research) and experience. Melville in some sense had to keep in one hand a theory of scholarship and in the other a theory of fiction to elaborate his compositional logic (one he shares with Ishmael). Melville must have held a contrasted view, like Ishmael on deck, observing the heads of the Sperm and Right whales, hanging from the cross trees.

Argument

I focus in this cartography on the theory of scholarship that organizes *The Whale*, and, in the end, the book as a whole. First, I will outline Melville's conceptions of a theory of expression

as well as contemporary discourse about individual, creative expression. Emerson was, in the first instance, a crucial figure who provided Melville a method of creative reading useful for mapping a theory that was significant for the mid-19th century American literary and cultural scene, which Matthiessen later termed the American Renaissance. Melville did not, however, take Emerson's thought without question: passages in *Moby-Dick* itself, his letters at the time of writing *Moby-Dick*, and "Hawthorne and his Mosses," distinguish Melville's own thought on the matter from Emerson, though he does not ever fall out of relation to the framework Emerson had set out in his essays.[5]

The theory of expression both Emerson and Melville had in mind did not have any generic limits; that is to say the theory (arranging the aim and purpose of expression) was appropriate for any type of expression (i.e. a usage of language in a broad sense). Expression, for the two, is an act of organic creation, so scholarship, if one would only keep to the personal, creative prerogative of the theory, may be its own sort of poetry. Ishmael is one of Emerson's American Scholars just as much as sailor's metaphysician and a quasi-Shakespearean dramatist—all in the American idiom.

Another project of this cartography will be to put Melville's and Ishmael's shared method of scholarship into relation with more recent contemporary scholarship on *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, beginning with F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941). Specifically, I will examine (what seems like) the usual focus of literary critical studies upon specific sections of the book and the frequent critical attitudes to the cetological and whale fishery chapters (normally that these are of

[5] Parker makes the argument that burdens any critical study of Melville's oeuvre with attention to Melville's biography. cf. Hershel Parker, "Being Professional in Working on *Moby-Dick*," *College Literature* 2.3 (Fall 1975): 192-197.

secondary importance). I argue that, against these tendencies, the almost endless and rambling discussions of natural science, cetology, whaling practice, whale arcana and art deserve more attention. These chapters are not mere contextualization or Melvillean extravagance. My cartography suggests, in other words, a need to elaborate a shift in critical understandings of these chapters of *Moby-Dick*, which I refer to as *The Whale*. *The Whale* is obviously necessary to the composition of *Moby-Dick* as a narrative ballast,[6] but I want to extend that requirement (of contextualization) in order to say *The Whale* is necessary to the composition of *Moby-Dick* as a work of art. *Moby-Dick* and *The Whale* share the same space, the same logic of composition, so the relationship between the two must be more intimate and complex than helpful contextualization or Romantic obsession. Scholarship in *The Whale* in other words is undeniably married to the experience of *Moby-Dick*. A consequence of my approach to Ishmael's scholarship is that I listen to the "method and scope" of his scholarly work. Because I listen, I may at times depart from more expected formulas of scholarship; listening to Ishmael, I will listen to myself

A Whale Romance; or, A Sailor's Yarn, Cooked with Fancy

Melville began to really think about his whale book at the end of 1849, sailing back to New York on the *Independence* after a tour of England and the Continent. His whaling years were already a significant time in the past, and he had not yet written of his experience with the Sperm Whale. He aimed to write the book on his own terms, and it seems he felt during the last month of 1849 at sea "that he deserved to take the financial risk of writing a book he

[6] cf. Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947), 67-68. The "ballast theory" of *The Whale* originated with Van Wyck Brooks.

wanted to write, not merely an anatomy of the whale fishery (one comparable to the book he underestimated as a mere anatomy of life on a man-of-war), but a book as comprehensively informative as *White-Jacket* yet also as ambitiously literary as *Mardi*."[7] Melville had a solid stock of real whaling experience from which he could write; he could describe the interactions among the crew, the yarns and superstitions, sailor companionship and bosom friends, the Nantucket idiom, whaler cosmopolitanism, and (though less comfortably) all of the intricacies of commercial whaling from personal experience and hearsay he picked up on whale-ships for months at a time.[8]

Moby-Dick, though, was a fictional project, however it may be that it rested partly upon autobiographical experience. He proposed the book, as he was in the middle of writing the thing, to his London publisher Richard Bentley in a letter dated 27 June, 1850; Melville calls his whale book "a romance of adventure, founded upon certain wild legends in the Southern Sperm Whale Fisheries, and illustrated by the author's own personal experience, of two years & more, as a harpooner."[9] Melville had an idea of the "great novelty" of the book, at least in the sense that whaling, though its commercial fame had already stimulated popular interest in whaling accounts, never was the subject and scene of any "adequate" fictional representation.[10] Elaborating a romance from whaling and the whale, however, required something more than experience, so Melville fell back upon his propensity to borrow from his books in order to

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[7] Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography, Volume 1, 1819—1851* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 693.

[8] Parker, *Herman Melville*, *1*, 694. cf. Parker and Hayford, "Melville's Reading and *Moby-Dick*: an Overview and a Bibliography," in *Moby-Dick*, 432.

[9] Herman Melville to Richard Bentley, New York, 27 June 1850, in *Moby-Dick*, 533.

[10] Melville to Bentley, 27 June 1850, 533. There were already many books about whaling in print, books against which he had to, in some way or another, differentiate his own. cf. Parker, *Herman Melville, I*, 712.

supplement his experience as needed.[11] The whaling accounts used in order to stir his memory[12] and a regimen of older books, classics, high(er) literature, and the bible (*the book*)[13] among others gave Melville other sorts of creative and compositional directions.

Moby-Dick was for Melville a project very different from any of the others he had yet developed, except maybe for hopes for his third book *Mardi*, but these he left alone after its critical failure in 1849. *Mardi* was a book he wanted to write, but apparently one many did not want to read, being too odd, too generically ambiguous. *Moby-Dick*, in spite of having similar motivations, was in many respects something very new for its author. Melville began writing in January just after disembarking at New York; he changed his writing habits and he seemed more reticent, reclusive—the whale book is his secret.[14] His trip to Europe late the year before and his intensified reading (and re-readings) of Shakespeare, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, De Quincey, Milton, Dante, and a long list of others had precipitated "an accelerated unfolding within himself."[15] In his usual haphazard and unsystematic way Melville was in the grip of a process of artistic becoming; he was coming into his own, knowing now full well the method and form of composition he wanted to exploit. *Moby-Dick* was to be a work of art genuinely elaborated upon his own terms, but his effort required years of thought and experience as a

[11] Parker and Hayford, "Melville's Reading," 433. Melville even in his earliest book *Typee* "had been from the outset a writer who borrowed heavily from previous writers."

[12] Parker and Hayford, "Melville's Reading," 432; Parker, *Herman Melville, I*, 698.

[13] Parker, *Herman Melville, I*, 699-700. See bibliography included at end of the short "Melville's Reading and *Moby-Dick*: an Overview and a Bibliography," 431-437.

[14] Parker, *Herman Melville, I*, 712.

[15] Parker, *Herman Melville, I*, 693.

writer and a reader. He told Nathaniel Hawthorne (whom he had met a little less than a year earlier) in a letter written in early May of 1851:

> I did not think of Fame, a year ago, as I do now. My development has been all within a few years past. I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids, which, after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew to greenness, and then fell to mould. So I. Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould.[16]

Melville explains that his creative powers finally achieved something like a complete development. He used the metaphor of an old Egyptian seed to represent his development, but Melville is cleverly literal. The English soil was the actual, earthy lands of England he stepped upon during his 1849 visit, in addition to the figurative literary ground of English writers from Shakespeare to Carlyle that had nourished Melville's fuller creative maturation. Melville was ready, flowering as a unique artist.

Melville, however, had to resolve a pressing aesthetic quandary–and this is our primary concern–, for he needed as an author and artist a compositional logic, some sort of form or mechanism to stitch together the dramatic narrative of the *Pequod* (potentially just another of those "wild legends of the Southern Sperm Whale Fisheries") and the nonfiction and commentary material, particularly those sections on cetology and the commercial practice of whaling.[17] The problem was at first formulated in another way, namely that of representing whaling as something worthy of a real piece of fiction. Before Melville wrote Bentley at the end of June in 1850, he wrote Richard H. Dana the first of May, describing some of his preliminary obstacles with his whale project:

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[16] Herman Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Early May 1851, Arrowhead, in *Moby*-Dick, 540-541.

[17] The lines of more abstract philosophical or metaphysical writing Melville could without much difficultly weave into a romantic narrative as something like free-flowing narrative speculation according to Ishmael's personality and writing style.

> About the "whaling voyage"—I am half way in the work, & am very glad that your suggestion so jumps with mine. It will be a strange sort of a book, tho', I fear; blubber is blubber you know; tho' you may get oil out of it, the poetry runs as hard as sap from a frozen maple tree;—& to cook the thing up, one must needs throw in a little fancy, which from the nature of the thing, must be ungainly as the gambols of the whales themselves. Yet I mean to give the truth of the thing, spite of this.[18]

Melville's first impediments to a newly developing creative process was to squeeze poetry from a commercial activity that, on the one hand, seemed exhausted already of its literary potential and, on the other, did not immediately seem the subject worthy of a great book. Walter Bezanson similarly explains Melville's original situation as "the problem of fiction" given the "matter" requirements for any book that aspired to a true representation –fictional or no– of whaling.[19] Melville, then, had to keep in mind simultaneously the demands of his subject matter and of fiction, which he could meet only through a specific "dynamic and a structure."[20] The "dynamic" was "the action of forces of bodies at rest," or, in other words, a mechanism Melville could use to propel his story and the matter of his story (whether Ahab, Moby Dick, or Ishmael)[21] through a structure unique to his own artistic methods and aesthetic principles over the year and a half he was composing the book.

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[18] Herman Melville to Richard H. Dana Jr., 1 May 1850, New York, in *Moby-Dick*, 533. cf. Parker, *Herman Melville, I*, 724-726.

[19] Bezanson, "Work of Art," 643. Bezanson means by "matter" the subject matter of *Moby-Dick* "in the gross sense." The requirement he outlines for any book on mid-nineteenth century whaling is a treatment of certain phenomena, artifacts, and processes. He provides a quick list of necessary areas of data including the "natural world," the "historical world," "artifacts," "techniques," "social organization," and the "object of voyage."

[20] Bezanson, "Work of Art," 643.

[21] cf. Bezanson, "Work of Art," 644-647. Bezanson crucially understands Ishmael to be the book's primary dynamic, "the real center of meaning and the defining force of the novel."

Extracts; or, Struggles with a Bookworm

The marriage of dynamic and structure, however, opened up another, more immediate secondary obstacle. This was the quandary that was mentioned above, namely the invention of a compositional logic from the book's dynamic and structure in order to establish the *OR* axis between those chapters and sections that make up *Moby-Dick* and their counterparts that compose *The Whale*. The finished structure of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* –which is really a commitment to be an unfinished structure like the Cathedral of Cologne[22]– is, as Melville promised Bentley (in a sense that the London publisher probably had not expected), a real novelty. The structure is clearly a very personal one, but even though Melville was motivated by his own creative desires, his task to define the structural principles of the work was a difficult one. Melville had to produce a form that, always personal and artistically unique, had to bring together his own real experiences of whaling and, on another side of it, all of the borrowed experiences from other accounts of whaling through a revitalized practice of reading. And all the while Melville had to seem that he was not, in fact, borrowing so heavily, that his "fancy" was not damaging "the truth of the thing." Melville's project in this sense entailed a great deal of artistic and compositional risk; his "wondrous" whale book is in the end "the original product of the assimilation of many other books."[23]

Melville was not unaware of the narrowness of his artistically risky path. It helped that he could look to recent American antecedents on this question of uniquely personal expression and the tools to resolve this potentially problematic assimilation of reading into personal experience. Part of the primary aesthetic obstacle of the book (Benzason's "problem of

[22] cf. Melville, "Cetology," in *Moby-Dick*, 124-125 and Preface, pp. 6-7.

[23] Parker and Hayford, "Melville's Reading," 435.

fiction") was defining its relation to the more general cultural burden to elaborate a *uniquely American* literary scene against the depreciatory criticism of Sydney Smith thirty years before.[24] Melville, as is well documented, returned to Shakespeare's plays around the time of writing *Moby-Dick* after finding a large type edition of the plays in 1849.[25] The plays, apart from thematic grounding and models of dramatic form and idiom, sparked internal anxieties about rote stylistic imitation of earlier literary forms, especially with reference to Shakespeare.[26] Melville, in other words, knew he had to personalize the largely informational accounts of the whaling industry and the science of the whale, as well as couch the language of the book in the American idiom in order to produce a work of authentic American expression.

Emerson had almost fifteen years earlier outlined the American Scholar; he laid the ground and set the framework through which any American writer at the time could think through anxieties about national literary expression as well as personal insecurity about or discomfort with the unique expression of some truth or another about life. Matthiessen is clear about the reach of Emerson's influence upon the American writer beginning in the 1830s; his study of the American Renaissance, an investigation oriented towards "*what* these books were as works of art,… evaluating their fusions of form and content,"[27] defines a historical

[24] Smith providentially wrote: "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue?," cf. Sydney Smith, "America. (E. Review, 1820)," in *The Works of the Rev. Sydney Smith, Vol. 1* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845), 372-374.

[25] Parker and Hayford, "Melville's Reading," 433.

[26] Parker, *Herman Melville*, 705, 739.

[27] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), vii. His study in other words concerns aesthetics and 19th theories and practices of literary composition in the United States. The books Matthiessen refers to are *Representative Men*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*, *Walden*, and *Leaves of Grass*.

circumstance whereby "[Emerson] wrote no masterpiece, but his service to the development of our [American] literature was enormous in that he made the first full examination of its potentialities."[28] Emerson was looking for real labor, *Man Thinking*, American writers equipped with the instruments of his scholarship and the temperament to express with the deepest self-trust.

Emerson expresses more concretely in "The American Scholar" Melville's anxious intuitions about the problematic marriage of prodigious reading (influence) and personality as a creative artist (who also goes by the name of the scholar). Digging for information on the whale and whaling as well as content for the fancy he described to Dana, Melville had to be careful not to eat up his instruments as would a bookworm. He could not be the "Late Consumptive Usher to a Grammar School" who compiled the Etymology[29] that precedes his whale book, and who seems to "value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate with the world and the soul."[30] Melville of course knew the power of a book as an artifact of the truth, but the book could not deprive him of original thought. Yet the books he could not keep from reading, so he had to read purposefully in order to know the boundary of foreign and personal thought. The boundary is ostensibly hard to maintain, for it takes real mental effort to be conscious of where another

[28] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, xii. Some lines before he writes: "the fact remained that Emerson's theory of expression was that on which Thoreau built, to which Whitman gave extension, and to which Hawthorne and Melville were indebted by being forced to react against his philosophical assumptions." In many senses, Matthiessen is correct about Hawthorne's and Melville's reaction "against" Emerson's theories, but there is also a sense that Matthiessen is not entirely correct. The claim seems to make the negotiation of the premises of an American theory of literary expression by these five too simplistic.

[29] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 7.

[30] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 17. Further down the page, Emerson says: "Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence."

one's thought ends and where one's own begins while one attends to some "philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds."[31]

Melville's labor on the whale book, dealing as he was with the volumes of English authors, had to be persistently self-referential in order to know and feel the boundaries of his truth from another's. Reading required of the flowering artist an intense purpose and rigor, research carried out not in order to reproduce the same already articulated "orbits"[32] of expression, but rather with an aim to activate creative personality in the scholar. The book, already a rearrangement, needs to serve for "nothing but to inspire" new constellations, rearrangements of the original arrangement of a book according to the scholar's own experience of the world.[33] Personal expression charged Melville to be an "inventor" practicing his own regimen of "creative reading" for the act of creation necessary for scholarship. He consequently put books to work in a very idiosyncratic way, manipulating gathered information, satirizing authors, and reappropriating the original experience documented in the book for his own scholarly purposes.[34]

Hawthorne and His Mosses; or, the "green damp mould" of Truth

Though the Emersonian model of creative reading was important for Melville, Emerson provided only a conceptual sketch of truth as the abstracted intention of the scholar's creative machinery. Emerson in other words gave no indication of what truth looks and feels like other

[31] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 18.

[32] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 17, "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system."

[33] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 17.

[34] Parker and Hayford, "Melville's Reading," 433; Parker, *Herman Melville, I*, 731.

than a notion of the alignment of the laws of the mind and the laws of the world. Melville, on the other hand, had a very personal idea of Truth, appropriate for an Emersonian Scholar, which he elaborated in his criticism of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Mosses and his Old Manse*.[35]

Melville met Hawthorne for the first time on August 5th, 1850. The whale book, at the time, was at least halfway finished,[36] according to Melville's letter to Dana dated three months before the meeting. Melville found something provocative in the older author, something or some aspect of his comportment and countenance. He wrote the long essay, "Hawthorne and His Mosses" within five or six days,[37] producing in it not only a wide commentary on Hawthorne's stories, but also an exposition of the change in his own conception of "Truth"[38] and his concerns about a specifically American literary culture. Truth is the ostensible underlying structure between each element of Melville's multivalent criticism in the essay: Truth connects Hawthorne to his literary ability and later to an ideal American literature. Melville speaks to, in the end, a question of aesthetics, and more particularly one that engages with the principles of Emerson's scholarship: that active life is transfigured into vital truth.

Truth, though, is not for Melville something upon the surface, immediately seen and experienced. Truth gets down to the reality of things, piercing the surface, striking through the

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[35] cf. Richard Chase, Introduction and "The Broken Circuit," in *The American Novel and its Tradition* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), vii-xii, 1-28. Chase outlines his argument of the historical tradition of the genre of romance in the American novel and, importantly, Hawthorne's influence in this development.

[36] cf. Parker, *Herman Melville, I*, 757.

[37] Every Duyckinck, editor of *Literary World* magazine which published Melville's essay, was visiting Melville at his family home in the western Massachusetts Berkshires; he delayed his return to New York City until Melville could quickly finish the essay and send off Duyckinck with the manuscript by the afternoon of Monday August 12. cf. Parker, *Herman Melville, I*, 751, 765.

[38] Parker, *Herman Melville, I*, 758: "The 'truth of the thing' in the 1 May letter to Dana seemed to refer to realistic depiction of American whaling; now "Truth" and truth-telling had acquired metaphysical dimensions."

mask, because "the world of any moment is the merest appearance."[39] The scholar knows appearance is no truth in any great sense; the scholar knows that, in other words, "the world is his who can see through its pretension."[40] In "Hawthorne and His Mosses" Melville is explicit about precisely such an understanding of Truth when he treats Shakespeare's representational and artistic force in his plays: "it is those deep far-away things in him; those occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth in him; those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality."[41] The scholar finds and tries to articulate the Truth he momentarily gets a hold of, like Narcissus as he stares into the pool that reflects his own "tormenting, mild image," and keeps a hold on it just long enough to express its subsurface truth.[42] The Truth apprehended as such is a rather dark reality, in the double sense that this reality is obscure –poorly lit– and that it is often tragic.[43] To capture Truth is in many ways to capture an aesthetic feeling of melancholy[44]

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[39] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 23. cf. Allen Hayman, "The Real and the Original: Herman Melville's Theory of Prose Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 8.3 (Fall 1962): 217.

[40] Emerson, "The American Scholar," 24.

[41] Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," 522. A couple of sentences later Melville finally concludes, finishing his remarks on Shakespeare's plays that, "for in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a sacred white doe in the woodlands; and only by cunning glimpses will she reveal herself, as in Shakespeare and other masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth,—even though covertly and by snatches."

[42] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 20. Writing Hawthorne eight months later with a secret review of *The House of the Seven Gables*, Melville had not much altered this notion of the Art of Telling the Truth: "By visable truth, we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him,—the man who, like Russia or the British Empire, declares himself sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth, " Herman Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne, [16 April?] 1851, Arrowhead, in *Moby-Dick*, 537. cf. Hayman, "The Real and the Original," 221.

[43] Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," 521: "For spite of all the Indian-summer sunlight on the hither side of Hawthorne's soul, the other side—like the dark half of the physical sphere—is shrouded in a blackness, ten times black…. Certain it is, however, that this great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free."

[44] Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," 520.

that is felt by anyone in tune with the irrationality of experience,[45] enclosed as it is by only the merest appearances.

Melville does not, however, foreground that faint melancholy, it being "the least part genius that attracts admiration"; Truth does not become something always and uselessly morbid, but its frequent morbidity is rather the symptom of a writer who, though he sees with "love and humor," possesses "a great, deep intellect, which drops down into the universe like a plummet."[46] The scholar cannot hide from himself the fact that, even if he looks in open daylight at the world even without a morbid disposition, life remains as ever ungraspable, a truth as tormenting as the mild image in a pool of water that conditions the Truth he tries to tell. Ishmael reflects Melville's honesty when he says, "there is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness."[47] The scholar must, nevertheless, continue to labor undiscouraged by darkness and, still, tell the Truth.[48]

The Truth of Melville's essay comes to define Melville's working aesthetic approach to his whale book, as well as a method for writing it. The method included exactly the sort of thing Melville does in his "Mosses" essay: namely, the assessment of the Truth in a book. The determined truth of a particular book, in Emerson's terms of creative reading, opened a

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[45] cf. Richard Chase, *The American Novel*, 89.

[46] Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," 520.

[47] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

[48] Melville follows Emerson in his notion of the inexhaustibility of expression, an approach the scholar must understand to be correct in order not to be "subdued" by the books that he reads. cf. Emerson, "The American Scholar," 16. Melville in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" rephrases Emerson, remarking, "nor has Nature been all over ransacked by our progenitors, so that no new charms and mysteries remain for this latter generation to find. Far from it. The trillionth part has not yet been said; and all that has been said, but multiplies the avenues to what remains to be said. It is not so much paucity, as superabundance of material that seems to incapacitate modern authors," 525.

potential "avenue" for inspired and indirect expression.[49] Hawthorne, because Melville discovers some part of the Truth in his stories, "dropped germinous seeds" into his admirer's being. It is a purposeful act of incorporation of a book—a vital reading (something Emerson does not describe very explicitly in "The American Scholar"). The labor of vital reading Melville engaged in "Mosses was the same he had to engage in his reading for *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. The practice of vital reading (rearrangements of rearrangements) in Ishmael's scholarship is apparent—he reads a lot, but he speaks from himself.

The Hyena; or, the Anxiety of Incoherence

Incorporation, however, does not of itself imply an appropriate expression of Truth; the incorporated material has not, as yet, been set out in language.[50] Hence Melville encountered a second difficulty: the form (or genre) of his expression of Truth.[51] His letters late in the composition of *Moby-Dick* relate some anxiety about the decision *to even express* in the first place, either for lack of self-trust (the reflection of anxiety about potential negative criticism) or for inadvertent infidelity to the truth of the matter. After a hiatus in his literary labors in the

[49] cf. Emerson, "The American Scholar," 18 on the indirect figurative light of a book. The book is a lamp light, whereas the sun (life) is a direct light.

[50] cf. Emerson, "The American Scholar," 20: "The actions and events of our childhood and youth are now matters of calmest observation. They lie like fair pictures in the air. Not so with our recent actions,—with the business which we now have in hand. On this we are quite unable to speculate. Our affections as yet circulate through it. We no more feel or know it than we feel the feet, or the hand, or the brain of our body. The new deed is yet a part of life,—remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour it detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought of the mind."

[51] Hayman writes that "as [Melville] experimented with the limits of the forms of fiction available to him–travel narrative, romance, novel, satire, allegory, epic, tragedy–he finally worked out a theory of prose fiction that was uniquely his, although an examination of his scattered comments concerning the writing of prose fiction reveals that throughout much of his career as a novelist he had no very clear conception of the techniques of his craft." Hayman, "The Real and the Original," 212. It is a problem for the critic, as Hayman makes clear, that Melville had no systematic understanding of the structure of even his own craft, but it is not a problem for the scholar-poet (Melville) as he writes. It is not systematic because it is just as much spontaneous as it is personal.

fall of 1850 so that he could move the family to a newly purchased house (Arrowhead) outside of Pittsfield in the Berkshires, Melville resumed work on his whale book over the winter. He wrote Evert Duyckinck December 13, 1850 admitting some uneasiness with his project:

> —Can you send me about fifty fast-writing youths, with an easy style & not averse to polishing their labors? If you can, I wish you would, because since I have been here I have planned about that number of future works & cant find enough time to think about them separately.—But I don't know but a book in a man's brain is better off than a book bound in calf—at any rate it is safer from criticism. And taking a book off the brain, is akin to the ticklish & dangerous business of taking an old painting off a panel—you have to scrape off the whole brain in order to get at it with due safety—& even then, the painting may not be worth the trouble.—[52]

The prospect of ever producing knowledge and truth in any absolute sense breaks down, for even if the technique for "scraping" is a very careful one, it is still fundamentally a crude exercise. Telling the truth "by snatches" is a tenuous and risky manner of expression though it is the only one an Emersonian scholar has at his disposal. Melville, as work on the book dragged out, seemed as a result to fall deeper into extreme oscillations of the sort mentioned in the December letter to Duyckinck—at one moment scaling the heights of reflexive artistic grandeur (knowing he is writing a great book) and at the other lamenting the project in the first place. The oscillations were a consequence of the dense ambiguity of the notion that "truth is ever incoherent," something that he wrote to Hawthorne little short of a year later, after reading Hawthorne's response to his whale book in November of 1851.[53]

Though he invoked the notion with excitement and promise, the incoherence could quickly upend Melville's motivation. The thought is a very precarious one because of its ambivalence: the scholar can sometimes enjoy a certain coherent incoherence (just as Ahab on the quarter-deck), but at other times feel the full weight of its import, watching (as Ahab

[52] Herman Melville to Evert Duyckinck, 13 December 1850, Arrowhead, in *Moby-Dick*, 534.

[53] Herman Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne, 17 November 1851, Arrowhead, in *Moby-Dick*, 546.

watches the White Whale sink the *Pequod*). The incoherence is an existential extreme of which the scholar is aware, a primitive and instinctual fear of the fact that appearance and deeper reality do not exactly line up. Emerson, speaking of the triviality of appearance in "The American Scholar," and Melville, writing in "Hawthorne and his Mosses" of the darkest sides of the world, come to realize the profound risk they take when, like Ahab and Hawthorne, they "[say] NO! in thunder."[54] The instability of Melville's project to write a great book discouraged expression at some point or other, for the fear of the possibility that "there is *no* secret."[55]

Economy, or, "as if the owners were my conscience"

While the danger of incoherence weighed heavily upon Melville's mind as he wrote about the whale, there was another discouragement in the background. Melville could not forget the negative criticism of *Mardi* as a somewhat traumatic experience as a writer: the book was very personal in its ambitions in the sense that he wrote it as a writer coming into his own particular modes of expression and creation,[56] but the work was generally rejected by critics. American readers still preferred the more amateur travel narratives *Typee* and *Omoo* over his first attempt to create a more personal work of art. Melville at the time had no other source of income: he was exclusively a writer. He turned out *White Jacket* and *Redburn* within a few months in 1849 (after *Mardi*) in order to make some quick cash. Melville's experience with negative reviews

[54] Melville to Hawthorne, [16 April?] 1851, 537.

[55] Melville to Hawthorne, [16 April?] 1851, 537.

[56] cf. Herman Melville to John Murray, 28 January 1849, New York, in *Correspondence: The Writings of Herman Melville, volume 14*, ed. Lynn Horth (Evanston, Illinois and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1993), 113-115.

warned him against any hopes for the popular success of his whale book, but he persisted even with the crushing probability that it was not going to sell.

Conscious of his decision to write as the book according to his interior motivations, Melville half-recklessly[57] jettisoned his more immediate economic prerogatives to provide for himself and his family. The tragic-heroic captain of the *Pequod* acts in exactly the same way; Starbuck constantly reminds Ahab of the obvious commercial imperatives of whaling, but Ahab purposefully spurns these and Starbuck on the quarter-deck. As much as he might have rationalized this choice as a matter of the "aristocracy of the brain," or "spontaneous aristocracy of feeling," in the moment of literary creation, Melville could not totally learn to live with the fact that "Truth is the silliest thing under the sun. Try to get a living by the Truth—and go to the Soup Societies…. Truth is ridiculous to men."[58] Even at the height of monomaniacal motivation, *that* sorry truth seethes below the surface, behind the scenes of production.[59] His personal expression in the whale book was inevitably obstructed in two related ways, the one that American readers and critics did not seem ready to recognize the greatness of his book, and the other that (because he could make no money from rejection) he "[was] so pulled hither and thither by circumstances," as his books did not make any money.[60] He continues in the May letter to Hawthorne:

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[57] By the time the book was published, his wife Elizabeth had given birth to a second son, Melville was supporting some of his extended family and had, in the middle of composing the book, bought an old farm house on mortgage in the Berkshires. Nor did Melville feel any immediate guilt for his recklessness; after publishing the book, he wrote Hawthorne, "It is a strange feeling— no hopefulness is in it, no despair. Content—that is it; and irresponsibility; but without licentious inclination. I speak now of my profoundest sense of being, not of an incidental feeling," 17 November 1851, 545.

[58] Melville to Hawthorne, Early May 1851, 538.

[59] Melville to Hawthorne, Early May 1851, 539.

[60] Melville to Hawthorne, Early May 1851, 539.

> The calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a man *ought* always to compose,—that, I fear, can seldom be mine. Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar. My dear Sir, a presentiment is upon me,—I shall at last be worn out and perish, like an old nutmeg-grater, grated to pieces by the constant attrition of the wood, that is, the nutmeg. What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,—it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches.[61]

So it was against extenuating economic circumstances and momentary plunges into deep self-mistrust that Melville wrote his whale book from a profounder and more insistent sense of his own personality and desire to express his findings of Truth. Melville and Ahab forcefully went against the grain to chase Moby Dick or *Moby-Dick*, but even the ruptures of literary usage in Melville's drama were more viable commercially than the bulky monograph of all things concerning the Sperm Whale, *The Whale* (clearly written against the grain of common generic conventions). The second title, on the other side of the *OR* axis, is the primary reason for the oddity of Melville's book, so that to describe it anything other than his whale book (as novel, romance, drama, tragedy, etc.) misrepresents it as a work of art that purposefully manipulates modes of expression in order to express the sometimes distinct facets of Truth.

Melville, in other words, needed a manifold set of tools, namely, all of those at the disposal of the scholar, who has only the one objective of creatively rearranging experience, sensation, intuition, action, all such things of his interior mental life, into some utterance of truth.[62] Melville plays with these modes in a circular fashion in order to approach Truth (an

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[61] Melville to Hawthorne, Early May 1851, 539.

[62] Nina Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," *PMLA* 94.5 (October 1979): 918, "The result is a structure giving Ishmael's voice the freest possible range, picking up each genre in turn and then going beyond it. In addition to the various categories suggested (or invented) by the contemporary reviews cited above, one observes in *Moby-Dick* such forms as the sermon; short story; occasional, scientific, political, and moral essay; satire; dictionary; encyclopedia; drama; dramatic monologue; manual; travelogue; character; tall tale; and prophecy. Its sections of fiction represent many different subgenres, from ghost story to melodrama to temperance tale to local-color sketch. *Moby-Dick* is a world where Fedallah and Stubb can exist aboard the same ship, a microcosm not only of the real world, in which no Fedallah has ever existed, but of the world of fiction as well, wherein he is a known type, even a stereotype. Because of its continual references to so many familiar literary genres both

expression of experience) in various patterns so that he does not lose it by chasing *The Whale* only in one singular monomaniacal way, Ahab.

The Mat-Maker; or, Quilt—Fiction, Nonfiction, in-Between

Melville was genuine in his May 1851 letter to Hawthorne: it is a final hash and a botch that did not sell. His project ended up a collection of sometime cohesive chapters and at others desultory asides; the book is a series of "some shanties of chapters and essays." The 19th century critics did not navigate well the shanties, at least not without some discomforting feeling of vertigo.[63] The shanties, though, all over carry the marks of their architect, and Melville for this very reason wrote Hawthorne that he cooked the book using "hell-fire."[64] And, after printing the book, Melville admitted to Hawthorne that he only "[felt] as spotless as the lamb."[65] It was "wicked" for breaching contemporary critical and literary sensibilities, but it was only outside of the pressure of literary conformism that Melville could express his Truth.

Melville disposed of those sensibilities, but it is not the case, as Nina Baym has argued, that Melville considered fiction as a fundamentally problematic mode of expression. Baym finds, noting that "none of Melville's longer works are wholly or even mainly fictive," that the writer "had no great respect for fiction… and that in the works that aspire to truth he expresses

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fictional and nonfictional, *Moby-Dick* manages to be interpretable even while submitting itself to no single genre. It seems to contain not only all possible statements that may be made about the whale but also possible literary and verbal modes in which such statements may be made."

[63] Hayman, "The Real and the Original," 232, "the theory of prose fiction that Melville expressed in his writing echoes at relatively few points the theories of the critics and reviewers of Melville's day… one comes away with a profound respect for a writer who dared to experiment with form and subject matter in a way foreign to every other nineteenth-century American writer." cf. William Thorp, cited by Hayman, "The Real and the Original," 219.

[64] Herman Melville to Nathanial Hawthorne, 29 June 1851, Arrowhead, in *Moby-Dick*, 542.

[65] Melville to Hawthorne, 17 November, 545.

a range of attitudes toward fiction that go from impatience with its demands to a clear sense that fiction and truth telling are opposed activities."[66] Melville, in other words, privileged even in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* his nonfictional modes of composition to his fictive ones for beings tools more equipped to express the Truth: fiction was an insufficient, naturally restrained literary mode.[67]

Melville composed *Moby-Dick*, in Baym's estimation, at a moment when he seemed to have more faith than usual in the usefulness of narrative fiction for telling at Truth: "Ishmael has many questions, but he does not question his own activity, the activity of verbalizing, of writing a book about a whaling voyage he once took as well as about his own thinking, in the present time, about the meaning of whales and whaling."[68] *Moby-Dick* was, in other words, a somewhat fortuitous and narrow moment of stability for a writer that afterwards quickly fell into a chaotic, linguistic despair (with *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*).[69] Ishmael's cramped stability, even so, did not exactly rescue Melville from his "quarrel with fiction," because *Moby-Dick* sometimes comes off as an excuse, and "opportunity to expound on whales in

[66] Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," 910.

[67] The insufficiency of fiction in Melville's mind (at least as conceived by Baym) consisted in the fact that the conventions of fiction must eventually crystallize as some particular genre, a logic that in the end controls any independent statement, including even those of Truth. Truth is hampered by the artifice of genre, whereas Truth must be independent. cf. Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," 914.

[68] Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," 915-916. Earlier Baym suggests, like I claim in this project, that "the contrast with Emerson's thought was the single most significant influence on the shape of *Moby-Dick*," 915. She does not consider, however, the influence as a "thematic critique" of self-reliance, but rather she proposed "the more pervasive and definitive influence evident in the concepts of truth and of the divine authorship of nature and language," 915.

[69] cf. Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," 920.

general," to write *The Whale*.[70] *Moby-Dick* was only an "attractive packaging" for Ishmael's magian mediations on the whale after the *Pequod*.[71]

Baym's analysis, however, does not recall the necessary multiplicity of modes provisioned by Emersonian scholarship. The so-called inadequacy of fiction is really only an expression of the inadequacy of any singular mode of composition; that is, Baym fundamentally mischaracterizes Melville's adaptation of Emerson's theory of expression and his abstraction of the scholar-poet.[72] Fictional and nonfictional literary modes are equally necessary and equally insufficient on their own; the problematics of language, even, were originally posited in Emerson's philosophical construction. Baym refers to Emerson's writing with, moreover, an uncomplicated notion of Emerson's undeniable Transcendentalist optimism, especially as regards language.[73] Emerson is not always so optimistic, sure of himself and of language. He drops a hint in "The American Scholar" of the extreme difficulty in piercing the appearances, masks, surfaces of reality in order to get down to its rawer "axis." His essay "Experience" later picked up in an explicit and immediate way a more fundamental quarrel with reality itself and the meaning of that quarrel for knowledge in general. Truth is not so easily apprehended for Emerson; and Melville usually reads Emerson's darker side.

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[70] Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," 917.

[71] Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," 917.

[72] cf. Hilbert, "The Truth of the Thing," 829.

[73] Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Ficiton," 910. Baym references almost exclusively Emerson's "Language" (in *Nature*, 1836) and "The Poet" (in *Essays: Second Series*, 1844), and paraphrases his philosophy as, "rightly seen, then, nature as a whole is not a collection of objects or facts but a language, a means of communication from God to man. God uses nature for signifying purposes. Man has access to language through his intuition, and his ability to comprehend God's meaning is proof of his likeness to God as well as of God's existence." Baym continues that the import to Melville of Emerson's philosophy of language, as far as Baym has defined it here, was "that the meaningfulness of nature, its function as language, *requires* the assumption of a prior Absolute, One who is speaking or writing through it and has decreed its meanings… in their most original moments human authors are the truest scribes, scriveners, or copyists," 916.

Knights and Squires; or, New Contexts for Moby-Dick

F. O. Matthiessen does not mention Emerson's 1837 speech until the end of his "Method and Scope" for *American Renaissance*, but it is clear that he too attempted to consciously elaborate new forms of American Scholarship.[74] Matthiessen's project has been fundamental to the study of American literature and Melville was an author his project could not do without; he effectively solidified in *American Renaissance* an already existing revival of Melville's literature that began in the 1920s. Matthiessen renewed the cultural discourse Emerson, Melville, and their contemporaries carried on in mid-19th century about American literature, not so much for the purpose of advocating for a distinctly American literary tradition, but rather to establish and elaborate *the study of* an original American literary tradition.

Matthiessen's scholarship, however, looks very different from the scholarship we see some decades later. Matthiessen laid the groundwork, but Melville studies have since disputed the terms of his aesthetic investigations, as Matthew Frankel has pointed out.[75] Parker, too, was quick to point out in 1975[76] that developments in Melville's biography and more comprehensive textual studies of *Moby-Dick* have made many of Matthiessen's arguments now hard to maintain. Matthiessen's analysis of the book consequently stands in many places on

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[74] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance,* vii-xvi.

[75] Matthew Cordova Frankel, "Tattoo Art: The Composition of Text, Voice, and Race in Melville's *Moby-Dick*," *ESQ* 53.2 (2007): 115-116, "for many recent scholars of U.S. literature working under the auspices of American Studies, reading certain aspects of F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941) can be a bit of an embarrassment. Specifically, Matthiessen's stated sense of the 'imaginative vitality' surging through his chosen masterpieces now tends to strike the dominant critical sensibility as an arcane response, at best a term from our inherited literary past, but more often than not a notion at once analytically vague and, despite, Matthiessen's democratic intonations, politically suspect. Apparently lacking any relevance for current research, the concept of vitality has been all but dismissed as a tenable mode of interpretative apprehension, treated oftentimes as a terminological symptom of Matthiessen's intellectual bad faith."

[76] Parker, "Being Professional," 193-194.

unstable critical ground: he unfairly overemphasizes Melville's negative reaction to Emerson,[77] stresses the influence of Shakespeare[78] without attention to other now recognized influences,[79] and concludes his critical account of *Moby-Dick* by classifying the book as drama, thereby limiting critical approaches to *Moby-Dick*.[80]

Matthiessen's groundwork is, nevertheless, too fundamental and too useful to reject outright; his account of Emerson's power over 19th century American literature is too important to abandon, and his vocabulary of aesthetic criticism is now fertile ground for original criticism—the same ground I have attempted cultivate here.[81] Matthiessen wrote in his last section on *Moby-Dick*, "[Ishmael] has reached the level where both abstraction and concretion have full play,"[82] anticipating the arguments I make here about experience (concretion, *Moby-Dick*) and commentary upon that experience (abstraction, *The Whale*). Matthiessen, in a word, unknowingly expresses and idea of the nature of the structure of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* that permits the separation of the book into too.

The evolution of Melville studies after 1941 can be described, in the first place, as the displacement of Melville-as-narrator from critical understandings of *Moby-Dick* and an

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[77] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, xii, 405, 440, 459, 466.

[78] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 423, 428, 430.

[79] cf. Jonathan Arac, "Heroism and the Literary Career: Carlyle and Melville," in *Commissioned Spirits*: *The Shaping of Social Motion in Dickens, Carlyle, Melville, and Hawthorne* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 139-163 as an example of influence outside of Shakespeare.

[80] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 415, 466. The cetological and other ramblings are, likewise, framed in terms of dramatic convention, of Melville's "Goethean appetite for all knowledge,"—the Faustian, or tragically Promethean impulse.

[81] Frankel makes a similar intervention as a central component to his argument in "Tattoo Art," 142.

[82] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 464

associated concentration on Ishmael as the absolute narrative center of the book.[83] The field continues, however, to reproduce the expected patterns of critical emphasis on *Moby-Dick* over *The Whale*. The emphasis is not so much a standard reading as a standard approach, a feature of most analyses of the book; Ahab and the *Pequod* deserve all of the attention, and the rest is either metaphysical extravagance or necessary contextualization. *The Whale* goes by many names: the ballast,[84] put-together asides,[85] obsession, pedantry, and similar characterizations. The critical reorientation to Ishmael, in other words, positioned him as a dramatist foremost, and a "whale author" on the side (he is a much better artist than a scholar).

The change in focus, while sometimes too extreme in squeezing Melville out of the book (along with a certain complexity in understanding the relation between Melville, Ishmael, and the book),[86] has nevertheless accomplished much. The Ishmael-as-narrator approach creates, has created, a certain critical space that is geographically complex and congenial to compelling scholarship.[87] Interest in the book's attitude towards language has provoked, additionally, a particular current of scholarship that has been, again, very productive.[88] These

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[83] Parker and Hayford, Preface to *Moby-Dick*, xiii. Olson on this point was prescient in 1947, "There remains Ishamel. Melville framed Ahab's action, and the parts Pip, Bulkington and the rest of the crew played in the action, within a narrative told by Ishmael. Too long in criticism of the novel Ishmael has been confused with Herman Melville himself," *Call Me Ishmael*, 57.

[84] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 416-417, 419, 421. cf. note 6 in Cartography, pp. 23.

[85] Chase, 100, 105, 110.

[86] cf. Beachy-Quick, "I / *I* / 'I,'" in *A Whaler's Dictionary*, 121.

[87] cf. Walter E. Bezanson, "*Moby-Dick*: Work of Art," in *Moby-Dick*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 641-657; Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, The Formula," in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 68-90; Tara Robbins Fee, "Irreconcilable Differences: Voice, Trauma, and Melville's *Moby-Dick*," *Mosaic* 45.4 (December 2012): 137-153; Matthew Cordova Frankel, "Tattoo Art: The Composition of Text, Voice, and Race in Melville's *Moby-Dick*," *ESQ* 53.2 (2007): 114-147; Manfred Pütz, "The Narrator as Audience: Ishmael as Reader and Critic in *Moby-Dick*," *Studies in the Novel* 19.2 (Summer 1987): 160-174.

[88] cf. Thomas F. Berninghausen, "Writing on the Body: the Figure of Authority in *Moby-Dick*," *New Orleans Review* 14.3 (Fall 1987): 5-12; Doran Larson, "Of Blood and Words: Ahab's Rhetorical Body," *Modern Language*

interrogations, nevertheless, have not frequently suggested any conceptualization in particular of the links between *The Whale* and *Moby-Dick*, nor, does it seem that they at all recognize *The Whale* as an appropriate subject of study in its own right.[89] Rodolphe Gasché's study of "Cetology" is, notably, one of the few studies of *The Whale*, but it is really more concerned with the figure of writing in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* and not the network of writing and experience (i.e. the network of connections between *Moby-Dick* and *The Whale*), which is my aim here.

Another sort of scholarly work has, additionally, been quite influential to the scope, elaboration, and style of this project. I mean the sort of poetic scholarship that is best represented by Charles Olson's *Call Me Ishmael*, in addition to older, essayistic styles of critical writing exampled by Emerson, Van Wyck Brooks, and Melville himself. Dan Beachy-Quick's *A Whaler's Dictionary* has been an extremely important book to the form this project has taken; his book inspired nebulous ideas that have developed into my words here. This requires a word:

Beachy-Quick writes a reference book. A dictionary is an incomplete artifact; I push the dictionary beyond its momentary and spontaneous point of contact with the surface of impression and response—I must submit my impressions to altogether different scholarly imperatives. But I do not lose any creativity, at least in Emerson's sense of the word. I hear it too often: we always want to set academic writing against creative writing, as if one were naturally less creative than the other. *Moby-Dick* is precisely a refutation of this attitude. I

Studies 25.2 (Spring 1995): 18-33; Dennis Patrick Slattery, "Watery World/Watery Words: Ishmael's Write of Passage in *Moby-Dick*," *New Orleans Review* 11.2 (Summer 1984): 62-66.

[89] cf. Hilbert, "The Truth of the Thing," 824-831.

have to be more methodical, and I have to, in my mind, reproduce the ambition and depth of Ishmael's scholarship in order to feel like I am faithful to the book and honest with myself. Beachy-Quick is faithful, but faithful in altogether another respect: he is faithful to a more obvious and provoking fragmentary mode of composition that Ishmael, too, often engages. Ishmael, however, does not compose only in this fashion. I simply understand the implied pragmatism (honesty) of Ishmael's manifold scholarship: we need always a switching of modes. I switch into another –one more direct and sustained– with reason and purpose. I have defined the logic of the *OR* axis and I place it at my disposal in order to interrogate the truth of this book and to expand the breadth of that truth.

V. Lamp-Light. *The Second Day*.

Argument

Ishmael, at some point or other, writes by the lamp-light. There is an irony in this which he never speaks of. He gets close: at the helm, Ishmael looks forward as the pagan harpooners bale minced whale blubber into the try-works, rendering the whale oil that fuels your lamp from the whale's stripped flesh. The blubber, separated from the substance which gave it form, is tossed underneath the pots to sustain the fire. It is a sort of practical joke to Ishmael. He explains, "in a word, after being tried out, the crisp, shriveled blubber, now called scraps or fritters, still contains considerable of its unctuous properties. These fritters feed the flames. Like a plethoric burning martyr, or a self-consuming misanthrope, once ignited, the whale supplies his own fuel and burns by his own body."[1] The whale is caught up in his own destruction. It is cosmically ironical, and Ishmael's humor is not far off the mark.

Ishmael never makes a similar joke about the composition of *Moby-Dick*. But the irony is this: the light of a whale oil lamp facilitates the writing of the book about *The Whale*. Ishmael is able to see the movements of his pen by the consumption of whale oil even as he chases leviathanic matters on the page. The lamp, in the end, makes Ishmael's story possible. The *Pequod* is after the oil it burns; the ship is not *just* the one Romantic Ahab commands, but the one that Peleg and Bildad partly own.[2] Starbuck annoys Ahab for, above all, reminding the

[1] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 326.

[2] Ahab resists, "'Thou art always prating to me, Starbuck, about those miserly owners, as if the owners were my conscience. But look ye, the only real owner of anything is its commander; and hark ye, my conscience is in this ship's keel,'" Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 362. Cf. Jonathan Arac, "'A Romantic Book': *Moby-Dick* and Novel Agency," *boundary 2* 17.2 (Summer 1990): 40-59. Arac suggests Ahab's aim to destabilize the hierarchy of principal and agent is represented in the novel with ambivalence, against an interpretation that Dimock proposes in *Empire for Liberty* that Ahab's agency is absolute. Ishmael, with Arac, recognizes in Ahab the "extraordinary

Captain of his economic prerogatives as the commander of a whaling vessel. Ahab, nevertheless, seeks his revenge by the ship, and Ishmael investigates the whale by its own light. Ahab and Ishmael both apprehend the world at its roots, and any idea of the mundane, commercial necessities of whaling do not significantly avert their attempts to penetrate the experience of *Moby-Dick*.

By the lamp-light Ishmael may return to the horrible trauma of a lonely castaway who floats over the wreckage of an entire ship and the bodies of some thirty men. The vapors of the whale oil lamp, after all, stand in for the spouting of the whale. Ishmael approaches his experience by the hint of those vapors: they called the whale man to probe the body of the whale that the lamp-light always already summons. Interrogations of the innumerable odds and ends of whale arcana together with the more scientific, cetological investigations–research towards a scholarly work that would become *The Whale*–restore, somewhat, Ishmael's grip on the body of his experience. The scholar had to write *The Whale* before the poet could pen *Moby-Dick*.

After the Pequod; or, Grief.

It is a wonder Ishmael remembers the investigations he carries out on the *Pequod*; he, at least, represents himself as making a few of these inquiries from the bows of the ship.[3] He admits

entanglements for action"—the trauma of *Moby-Dick* warns Ishmael against the example of Ahab, Arac, "'A Romantic Book,'" 46.

[3] Not only did Ishmael work on his cetological writings on the *Pequod*, but he also refers to the ship in order to anatomize the whale ship and generalize the commercial practice of whaling. *Moby-Dick* is, still, an important historical resource of information and descriptions of whaling in the mid-19th century (not to mention a text that has stimulated broad cultural interest in the whale and whaling), even if its cetological surmises are now scientifically untenable. The New Bedford Whaling Museum and the Nantucket Whaling Museum in Massachusetts both communicate an idea of Melville's influence.

the story he tells happened "some years ago—never mind how long precisely."[4] *The Whale*, of course, is something Ishmael elaborated over the years after the *Pequod*'s disaster—the intervening years he spent in libraries, at sea, in the Pacific, in Lima, thinking about the whale all the time, gathering information, chasing what could never actually be caught.[5] *Moby-Dick* is another story; writing it was an exercise of memory by a wracked mind traumatized by an extremely powerful experience of loss and loneliness.[6] But maybe Ishmael does not write absolutely from memory. There is a suggestion three-quarters of the way through the book that Ishmael writes while on the *Pequod*. It is a short chapter, only a half of a page, titled "The Lamp."[7] A unique eccentricity of a whale ship, Ishmael explains, is that even the forecastle, where the subaltern crew sleeps, is at every hour illuminated:

> But the whaleman, as he seeks the food of light, so he lives in light. He makes his berth an Aladdin's lamp, and lays him down in it; so that in the pitchiest night the ship's black hull still houses an illumination.
>
> See with what entire freedom the whaleman takes his handful of lamps—often but old bottles and vials, though—to the copper cooler at the try-works, and replenishes them there, as mugs of ale at a vat. He burns, too, the purest of oil, in its unmanufactured, and, therefore, unvitiated state; a fluid unknown to solar, lunar, or astral contrivances ashore.[8]

One has the thought that Ishmael does not so often sleep. From the beginning in New York, he carried in his carpet bag a notebook and a pen. He writes below decks as the others sleep: somnambulism at the Mast-Head and in the Pacific; overhearing Ahab; observations on the head of the Sperm whale and the Greenland whale, side by side; surmises on the practices

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[4] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 18.

[5] The idea is not unfamiliar to *Moby-Dick* scholarship. cf. Bezanson, "Work of Art," 645; Colatrella, "*Moby-Dick*'s Lessons," 167; Fee, "Irreconcilable Differences," 140; Pütz, "The Narrator as Audience," 166.

[6] cf. Fee, "Irreconcilable Differences," 137-153.

[7] Melville, *Moby*-Dick, 329.

[8] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 329.

of whaling; his will and testament; squeezes of the hand; notes towards a metaphysics of the whale; gams; lowerings; all go into the notebook. If the whale ship is his Yale College and his Harvard,[9] then the forecastle is his study.

His study is destroyed by the chase.[10] The notebook of experience and abstraction is drowned with his bosom friend and the rest of the crew. The *Rachel* finally picks him up. Exhausted, he sleeps for almost a day. He wakes and straightway he asks for pen and paper. The Captain, he too lost in despair (the sea has swallowed his youngest son), sets Ishmael at an unfamiliar cabin table with the appropriate materials. He sees something unnamable in the fixed, detached stare of the tired castaway that he, too, can feel in himself—in the same way Ahab heard something of himself in the crazed, foolish words of Pip. The lamp swings overhead.[11] Ishmael writes and does not stop, vaguely knowing he cannot because a moment of reflection will resuscitate the horribleness of the tragedy. In the quasi-calmness of shock, he writes mainly about the *Pequod* and Ahab; writing below decks in the *Pequod* had helped the memory of his experience stick in his mind. He finishes and what he has is a working outline of the narrative of *Moby-Dick*.

He stuffs the papers into another bag someone has given him to make up for the one which sank with the *Pequod*. He sleeps again and afterwards assimilates into the crew as

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[9] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 101.

[10] The act of the chase must be understood simultaneously at various concrete and symbolic levels. In truth it is a knotty activity and symbol, but that is precisely Ishmael's problem: he cannot sort out his experience of the chase of *Moby-Dick*. The dense, multivalent meaning of chase–he has to be aware of it if he titled his book *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*–leads him into a vortex of contradiction and rigorous irrationality; it condemns him to experience over and over again, like Ixion, the episodes of *Moby-Dick*.

[11] The Captain of the *Rachel* would have, perhaps, described Ishmael as Ishmael described Ahab: "while thus employed, the heavy pewter lamp suspended in chains over his head, continually rocked with the motion of the ship, and for ever threw shifting gleams and shadows of lines upon his wrinkled brow, till it almost seemed that while he himself was marking out lines and courses on the wrinkled charts, some invisible pencil was also tracing lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead," Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 166-67.

another whaleman. Ishmael goes about the next couple of years unable, really, to return to the papers which document his memory of the *Pequod*. However, he keeps writing, but about other things. He comes back to the *Pequod*, though only obliquely, with his cetological project. Finally he decides to write a whale book, an account of the *Pequod*, which now includes *The Whale* (cetological research, reports of commercial whaling, and fragmentary philosophical treatises). All are methods to revisit experience, to try to make some sense of Ahab's self-destructive revenge, on their own particular methodological terms. *Moby-Dick*, too, is not simply an extension and elaboration of the original manuscript–those papers written on-board the *Rachel*–but it is refracted in the same effort to make sense of something violently absurd. A certain "acceptance of contradictions" gives Ishmael the recourse to refract (conjunction), and in so doing, "his management of his experience produces a narrative preternaturally congruent with the framework posited by trauma theory: it is resourceful and imaginative, but fragmented and incoherent. It is a survival stratagem, but one that entails its own risks and costs to the psyche."[12] Ishmael takes the story and sets it to dramatic convention, oddly writes stage directions, is liberal with omniscience. One realizes: he is also an artist, even if a traumatized one.[13]

The first series of chapters on land –"Loomings,"[14] the first, is a sort of preface– are straight from the notebook. The skeleton of the narrative is at least built out; Ishmael writes

[12] Fee, "Irreconcilable Difference," 147.

[13] Fee suggests that, as a traumatized subject, Ishmael understands "the ethical problem, not the ultimate impossibility, of art after cataclysmic trauma" and more fundamentally, "that art, that narrative, must prevail because life itself continues after trauma, and it is only art that can interpret the pieces that remain," "Irreconcilable Differences," 151. Fee, however, seems to privilege a narrow definition of art that Ishmael does not share; his scholarship in the *The Whale* is just as poetic as his drama of *Moby-Dick*. Both are the fragments of a traumatic experience, specific and useful in their own ways for the work of art that is *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* but Fee hardly makes any mention of the traumatized scholar.

[14] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 18-22.

himself into the book as a conventional sort of narrator, adds a bit of flesh to the skeleton in order to make his notebook more readable. Ishmael, on land, is sure of himself. He probably passed through the whaler's chapel another time, heard Father Maple sermonize a second or third time so as to record more faithfully his oration. He boards the *Pequod* and the structure of the book begins to change. Ahab comes above hatches; Ishmael speculates on the character of the captain until finally at the first sight of him, "powerfully did the whole grim aspect of Ahab affect [him]."[15] The man, an architect of disaster, provokes a new sort of composition, the transition from the "truth of the thing" to the "Truth." As if a reminder that Ishmael writes and does not exactly narrate, he titles the twenty-ninth chapter "Enter Ahab; to him, Stubb."[16] It is the first stage direction: the tragedy is set into motion as the *Pequod* pushes more and more to the south. Ishmael disappears by the next chapter, though he is still on the ship.[17]

It is only that he slips out of view as a writer: he narrates more directly as an artist rather than as a narrator.[18] An artist does not need to say: "I was covertly observing Captain Ahab at the bows as I was sweeping near the quarter deck; he muttered something about his pipe and then threw it into the sea. He turned around and caught my eye as I looked after the tossed pipe."[19] He again overhears Stubb telling Flack about a dream he had the night before.[20]

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[15] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 109.

[16] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 110-112.

[17] cf. Fee, "Irreconcilable Differences," 140, 142-143.

[18] There is, of course, another possibility, the one that Melville (the true author) has given himself the reins of narration, recklessly writing his narrator out of the story. The possibility is kept in mind, but, like Frankel, the understanding is that, here, Melville and Ishmael cannot relate to each other on a one-to-one basis, "Tattoo Art," 126.

[19] Ishmael actually writes: "'How now,' he soliloquized… He tossed the still lighted pipe into the sea. The fire hissed in the waves; the same instant the ship shot by the bubble the sinking pipe made. With slouched hat, Ahab lurchingly paced the planks." Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 113.

[20] This is chapter 31, "Queen Mab," *Moby-Dick*, 113-114.

The next chapter (the thirty-second) is the first of whale arcana, "Cetology."[21] The italicized metaphor of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (Moby Dick into *Moby-Dick*) is established[22] as well as the foundations of his whale scholarship. Ishmael organizes whales into books–Folio, Octavo, Duodecimo–depending on size, but only after admitting that his work on *The Whale* preceded the composition of *Moby-Dick*:

> Already we are boldly launched upon the deep; but soon we shall be lost in its unshored, harborless immensities. Ere that come to pass; ere the *Pequod*'s weedy hull rolls side by side with the barnacled hulls of the leviathan; at the outset it is but well to attend to a matter almost indispensable to a thorough appreciative understanding of the more special leviathanic revelations and allusions of all sorts which are to follow.
>
> It is some systematized exhibition of the whale in his broad genera, that I would now fain put before you. Yet is it no easy task. The classification of the constituents of a chaos, nothing less is here essayed.[23]

His classification (appropriately "essayed" instead of assayed) brings together whale and book setting up a strange refrain, the whale is a book and the book is a whale.

"The Specksynder,"[24] the proceeding chapter, introduces the commercial history of whaling, yet another subject of the encyclopedic labor of *The Whale*. Two chapters after "Cetology" Ishmael writes "The Mast-Head"[25] in another compositional mode. Though it may perhaps be the immature, pantheistic ramblings of a young Ishmael, it shows a disposition for mystical musings and metaphysics. (He does, to be sure, mature; he never carelessly falls from the top.) The next chapter, "The Quarter-Deck,"[26] is a definitive aesthetic rupture with the

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[21] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 115-125.

[22] cf. Beachy-Quick, "Classification," in *A Whaler's Dictionary*, 32-33; Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 125.

[23] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 115.

[24] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 125-127.

[25] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 131-136.

[26] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 136-142.

narrator Ishmael was on land. Ishmael is a dramatist and Ahab is on-stage, standing on the elevated platform of the quarter-deck. Ishmael shows himself as a whale scholar and a poet within a span of a few chapters. The rest of *Moby-Dick*, however, is not simple artifice, for Ishmael does not employ dramatic composition only to excite a more skeletal narrative into liveliness. The art is, at the same time, a probing of experience through composition, both scholarly and poetic. The reader is made to understand that Ishmael conceives of aesthetics as the reflection of particular modes of perception.[27] His aesthetic is, in general, an aesthetic of multiplicity, of keeping in one hand or the other a plurality of specific aesthetic structures from which he can choose, and that, in the end, permits his artistic motive to consistently engage mode-switching.

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A thin, steamy mist floats up from the top of Ishmael's head, swimming in metaphysics and hot tea. He writes in the attic—a poor, crude garret apartment furnished with an uncomfortable straw mattress, a small wooden desk and chair, and not least a half-broken, sooty oil lamp blackened by hours of use. Ishmael, another mad writer in a another shabby garret, probably moved in with only a carpet-bag, a couple of books, a pen, ink, a small mirror, and a notebook of blank paper. He notices, provoked by some impulse to look at himself in the mirror as he wrote, "a curious involved worming and undulation in the atmosphere," or the warm vapors of his sweat.[28] He is writing a "little treatise on Eternity" in the middle of an August day, so he does not have the oil lamp at this moment lit if he is lucky to have a modest

[27] Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2015), 61.

[28] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 293.

gable window above his desk.[29] But he may not have a window, or he could stay writing the treatise until after the sun sets. Ishmael would then have to light the lamp, turn it on; after a few minutes another steamy vapor would rise, mixing with the atmosphere of thought, as he writes by the lamp-light. The lamp sends this second steam, glowing with the heat of burning oil, throwing light upon his page, casting shadows elsewhere.

The Try-Works; or, Crisis before Catastrophe

Ishmael composes *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* under the light of the lamp. The book that Ishmael writes is, too, in part a description of the proto-industrial processes[30] that produce the whale oil he would later pour into the sooty lantern at his desk. A series of chapters detail the production of the oil rendered from the body of the Sperm Whale; "The Cassock," "The Try-Works," "The Lamp," and "Stowing Down and Clearing Up" follow the whale's carcass dragged alongside the ship, horrifyingly stripped naked of its "Blanket." The chapters (of *The Whale*) are, too, a scene of crisis for Ishmael, of a dark and hallucinatory experience at the helm. A realization that he, though he may momentarily steer the *Pequod*, does not really have any control over his experience–over the events unfolding in *Moby-Dick*–provoke the crisis, compounded by the visions of a brutal exploitation of the body of the whale. *Moby-Dick* is often, Bezanson writes, penned in by a shimmering "world of dreams."[31] As Ishmael guides

[29] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 293.

[30] The try-works made mid-eighteenth century whalers their own "floating factories that held all the necessary equipment and expertise to seek, kill, retrieve, and render a whale into tidy barrels below decks." Ishmael accounts for all of this at detail. The account mobilizes an image of the ship, represents production at work, in motion; one gets the sense of "the whaling boat's technical efficiency and self-sufficiency" reading of the whalemen laboring before the mast. It is a monumental and global work: "the improved technology of whaling, particularly the on-board try-works, enabled the markets to expect a regular supply of whale oil and entrepreneurs to find more uses for its products," Scott, "Whale Oil Culture," 6.

[31] Bezanson, "Work of Art," 651.

the whaling vessel so as to keep it from capsizing, from "the fatal contingency of being brought by the lee," the fire at the pots lures Ishmael into a nightmare.[32] "It is not strange," Bezanson continues, "then, that young Ishmael's moment of greatest crisis, the night of the try-works when he is at the helm, should be of a traumatic order."[33]

The fire at the try-works puts Ishmael to sleep, but the sleep only confuses wakefulness and dream. He wakes up, "thought [his] eyes were open," but it is a sort of half-consciousness. There is an attempt to make the half a whole, "putting [his] fingers to the lids and mechanically stretching them still further apart."[34] He realizes that somehow in his quick nodding-off he has turned himself around; he is awake, but the confusion makes for "this unnatural hallucination of the night."[35] The hellishness of the solitary *Pequod* (rendering the substance that keeps it afloat as a commercial business) lulls Ishmael, like others of the crew "looking into the red heat of the fire, till their eyes felt scorched in their heads," into a stupor.[36]

Momentarily relieved from his stupor, Ishmael recognizes the brutishness of the fire and of the entire process of its ignition—harpooning, lancing, cutting-in, mincing, and burning flesh. He cries against the fire's equally brutal power to tranquilize, to cast an "unnatural" hue upon reality: "look not too long in the face of the fire, O man!... believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly." Then, of course, Ishmael consoles, "to-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking

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[32] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

[33] Bezanson, "Work of Art," 651.

[34] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 327.

[35] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

[36] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 327.

flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief; the glorious, golden, glad sun, the only true lamp—all other but liars!"[37]

The sun reveals the "truth of the thing," shows the earth in broad daylight without any illusory tint. It is the clarity of wakefulness, while the fire makes for hallucination. The fire tends to make a looker-on conflate wakefulness and dream, reality and illusion. The sun disentangles that confusion, sets aright one's grip on wakefulness and exposes the falseness (artificiality) of hue and illusion. The sun, in a word, wakes up the dreamer in the morning, rescues Ishmael from the vague and slippery dream reality. In the morning the metal pots are covered up, "the great hatch is scrubbed and placed upon the try-works, completely hiding the pots" and "with buckets of water and rags" the crew "restore" every inch of the ship "to their full tidiness."[38] The try-works hidden, Ishmael is no longer pursued by the dark association of the try pots and death he earlier made in Nantucket. Queequeg and Ishmael come to the "Try Pots," an inn recommended to them in New Bedford by Peter Coffin; at the doorway, "two enormous wooden pots painted black… swung from the cross trees… this old top-mast looked not a little like a gallows."[39]

The sun, too, cuts through what seemed to be somewhat of a recurring dream for Ishmael. He is man who

> between the sheets, whether by day or night, and whether asleep or awake, [has] a way of always keeping [his] eyes shut, in order to concentrate the snugness of being in bed. Because no man

[37] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

[38] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 330.

[39] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 66. Death and suicide, in other words, follow Ishmael even as he tries to escape it. The cosmic irony of *Moby-Dick* is that Ishmael goes to sea as a "substitute for pistol and ball," but Ahab's mission nearly kills him, and trauma after the disaster eats at the man. He faints in Lima as he spins his yarn of Radney, Steelkilt, and Town-Ho: he was not ready to "rehearse" all of *Moby-Dick* then, Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 211.

> can ever feel his own identity aright except his eyes be closed; as if darkness were indeed the proper element of our essences, though light be more congenial to our clayey part.[40]

Yet when he does close his eyes in an instant his "identity comes back in horror"; eyes closed, feeling his identity aright, dark dreams and shadows cast by the fire again preoccupy the man.[41] The horror of dream rather than the sun wakes Ishmael: he encounters some part of himself, of his identity, that he would rather keep from himself because it is too much for him, or else too slippery a thing to grasp, get a solid hold on. The nightmare was a reflection of Ishmael's absurd lack of control; "the step-mother world"[42] turns him around, punishing Ishmael for momentarily forgetting the lesson of the fable of Narcissus he tells in "Loomings."

Ishmael stops himself at "liars" when he speaks of the sun being the only true lamp-light in the world. The world that the sun illuminates is a stepmother world. Ishmael begins to meditate on another, more horrible and Romantic possibility for a configuration of natural and unnatural light; it is a configuration, in other words, that foregrounds the tension between "the truth of the thing" and the "Truth." The light of the fire fractures wakefulness, and in so doing it, perhaps, exposes an intrinsic instability of the "true reality," of the truth of the thing—really,

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[40] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 58.

[41] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 136.

[42] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 405. There is another, older trauma wrought by Ishmael's stepmother "who, somehow or other, was all the time whipping [him], or sending [him] to bed supperless," though he, again, does not betray the full traumatic weight of the event. She, like the world, disciplines the child Ishmael with a hallucination, and "whether it was a reality or a dream, [he] never could entirely settle." He writes, "At last I must have fallen into a troubled nightmare of a doze; and slowly waking from it—half steeped in dreams—I opened my eyes, and the before sun-lit room was now wrapped in outer darkness. Instantly I felt a shock running through my frame; nothing was to be seen, and nothing was to be heard; but a supernatural hand seemed placed in mine. My arm hung over the counterpane, and the nameless, unimaginable, silent form or phantom, to which the hand belonged, seemed closely seated by my bedside. For what seemed ages piled on ages, I lay there, frozen with the most awful fears, not daring to drag away my hand; yet ever thinking that if I could but stir it one single inch, the horrid spell would be broken. I knew not how this consciousness at last glided away from me; but waking in the morning, I shudderingly remembered it all, and for days and weeks and months afterwards I lost myself in confounding attempts to explain the mystery. Nay, to this very hour, I often puzzle myself with it." The episode at the try-works was one such attempt. Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 37-38.

wakefulness and reality seemed so clear and given because the fissures of its contradictions were overlooked even in broad daylight. Narcissus, after all, looks into an image of wholeness.

Lamps and Lanterns; or, the Scholar's Dilemma

The fire forces Ishmael into a reflection upon the nature of perception itself in his effort to tell the Truth. The whale troubles Ishmael's handle on reality—so too the whale's oil. The unnatural, seductive flames produce the purest of oil that makes for the purest of lights. The whale-oil light illuminates the forecastle and the cabin, but Ishmael is familiar with its gross genealogy even if he praises the final product. The original whale-oil light–unprotected by the glass apparatus of a lamp–at the try-works makes for a frame of mind that finally notices "the sun hides not Virginia's Dismal Swamp, nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon. The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this earth."[43] The artificial light of the fire never did hide the dark side of the earth as the *Pequod* sailed on top of it. Only it lights the *Pequod*'s passage through the ocean, making the ocean even more horribly dark at the edges of the light thrown by the fire. It illuminates not exactly an intensified reality, as Ishmael at first seems to say. The morning sun, in his earlier thought, dissipates intensification, an unnatural hue; the sun brings everything back into the normal relation between things. But, as he says, the idea is a little too easy. Fire in the end exposes a darkness darkened, another configuration of reality mediated by the artificial light of fire. The world lit even by the sun is forever changed by the fire. The whale creates problems for Ishmael's scholarship because it

[43] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

swims where Ishmael never can; the oil of a whale more fundamentally upsets his grip on reality and Truth.

The lamp-light and the oil that fuels its flame represent a deep and immediate problem for the scholar. The scholar must deal with the fact he produces knowledge with broad limit and at great risk; the surface of both the world outside and the mind inside are only plain appearances, without depth. Ishmael admits "I have ever found your plain things the knottiest of all," a notion that is really only a restatement of the reason for Narcissus' drowning.[44] The world is, in effect, a dream, an unstable, defamiliarized reality. Ishmael characterizes that dream as a return to primal conditions, when man, "unknowing from whence he came, eyed each other as real phantoms, and asked of the sun and the moon why they were created and to what end."[45] The scholar with great effort attempts to seize reality–otherwise he has no basis for interrogation–but Ishmael is aware that his experience is one that often prevents seizure and he, too, must be faithful to his experience as a scholar.

Ishmael, however, may light the lamp. The raw light of the fire at the try-works has been purified and worked into a substance for a more congenial light. The whale's body is released and left behind and the casks of salable oil are stowed in the hull, below decks. The whale-oil, that is to say, is never exactly the whale. The body is turned into something entirely different, a light. The phantom of the whale, Ishmael finds though, always swims in the vapors of the lamp. It is the same with Ishmael's body of experience. He produces knowledge, he describes, tells in *The Whale* things that go on the world whether or not he is in it, but *Moby-Dick* is always at some level *The Whale*. The project at which Ishmael is at work is a project

[44] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 292.

[45] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 191. cf. Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 79-85, for Melville's interest in the Old Testament.

provoked by an attempt to return to the vortex of wreckage.[46] He writes *The Whale* and he comes back to, refers to, a body of experience that does not make any sense. *The Whale* remediates *Moby-Dick* which is already a remediation of concrete experience: the transition between the light of the fire to the lamp-light is the same as the movement between *Moby-Dick* and *The Whale*. So *The Whale* is as much for himself as it for one wanting to know anything about the practice of whaling and the anatomy of a Sperm Whale. *The Whale* is, in other words, a very personal scholarship. Experience, being in the world—he abstracts these in order to find out something about the ungraspable phantom of *his own* life: Ishmael moves from the vortex of wreckage to the "Descartian vortices" that lurk beneath the mast-head.[47]

As an artist, Ishmael is, too, aware of the proximity of art and artifice, and it is the lamp light which illuminates the shadowy coincidence. The light produced by the lamp and the book produced by the writer share many qualities.[48] Foremost is the element of inevitable and problematic mediation: the light remediates the sun and the book remediates experience, something Ishmael realizes in the last words of "The Try-Works."[49] Ishmael describes the entire process of whale-oil production that lets a whaleman "[take] his handful of lamps—often but old bottles and vials, though—to the copper cooler at the try-works, and [replenish] them there, as mugs of ale at a vat," as if the brutality of that process had been erased.[50] The fire is,

[46] cf. K. L. Evans, "A Tale of Attachment," in *Whale!* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1-25.

[47] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 136.

[48] cf. note 49 of Cartography, pp. 35.

[49] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

[50] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 329.

though, the model for the light of a whale-oil lamp—the savage, impure original. This Ishmael can never again forget.

The Man of Sorrows; or, the Scholar under the Weight of Experience.

The artificial light forces Ishmael to see the dark side of the earth even in the light of day. Reality, in darkness, mutates and betrays its ultimate mutability. And that it changes always potentially means what is real really does not make any sense. Dependency is no condition of stability, of the way things are or should be. The real problem, though, is not that reality is not stable, but that Ishmael cannot get a solid hold upon whatever is before him at the moment. He cannot entirely reconcile experience as something that always changes, slips away. Experience is caught, ultimately, in contradictoriness, irrationality.[51] The secret of the ocean is revealed to Ishmael: it is dark (beyond the absence of light) for being a contradictory, irrational force.[52] Experience, too, holds a secret: the *Pequod* sinks with an entire drowned crew and only burps up a coffin for Ishmael to float on.[53] Floating, Ishmael stares into the salty water for a day, and sees "that same image," the one at which Narcissus cannot keep from staring, "the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all."[54]

[51] cf. Chase, "Melville and *Moby-Dick*," 89-115.

[52] Ishmael, himself, risks not making any sense in *Moby-Dick*. It is, after all, a sailor's (turned artist) yarn, told through a sensibility formed by experience at sea. And sailors hardly ever make any sense. Coleridge's "Ancyent Mariner" is, perhaps, a trope.

[53] Emerson writes in "The American Scholar," "On [our recent actions,… the business which we now have in hand] we are quite unable to speculate. Our affections as yet circulate through it. We no more feel or know it than we feel the feet, or the hand, or the brain of our body. The new deed it yet a part of life,—remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life," 20.

[54] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 20.

Ishmael's phrase here, though, is perhaps more auspicious than saying "the irrationality of experience," but it is what he seems to mean. Just after his hallucination at the helm he gives Solomon's formulation: "'All is vanity.' ALL." Ishmael's experience of the world is one of "the truest of all men," who was "the Man of Sorrows."[55] Ishmael is a scholar who drops the labor of the Man of Letters to pick up the work of the Man of Sorrows.[56] He repurposes the phrase for a scholar who perceives his proximity to dark nonsense of the world and, hence, the impersonality of his own experience.[57] In such a way man is true to himself: he laughs at the nonsensical, practical joke of the universe.[58]

But Ishmael is aware of the problem of mediation, of, to some degree or other, the futility of making sense of the secret of the sea. So he persistently contradicts himself, swings between the overwhelming, Pacific, "inscrutable tides of God" and the very same Descartian vortices which are those waves.[59] Ishmael has some of Melville's petulance. He writes to Hawthorne, after complaining of Solomon's holding back truth "with a view to popular conservatism":[60]

> In reading some of Goethe's sayings, so worshipped by his votaries, I came across this, *"Live in the all."* That is to say, your separate identity is but a wretched one,—good; but get out of yourself, spread and expand yourself, and bring to yourself the tinglings of life that are felt in the flowers and the woods, that are felt in the planets Saturn and Venus, and the Fixed Stars. What nonsense! Here is a fellow with a raging toothache.

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[55] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

[56] cf. Arac, "Heroism and the Literary Career: Carlyle and Melville," in *Commissioned Spirits*, 139-163.

[57] cf. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 469-492.

[58] This is Ishmael's feeling when he drafts a copy of his will after the first lowering in "The Hyena," Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 188-189.

[59] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 136. See the often referenced last paragraph of "The Mast-Head."

[60] cf. Herman Melville to Evert Duyckinck, Boston, 3 March 1849, in *Correspondence*, vol. 14 of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, ed. Lynn Horth (Evanston, Illinois and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1993), 120-122.

> "My dear boy," Goethe says to him, "you are sorely afflicted with that tooth; but you must *live in the all*, and then you will be happy!" As with all great genius, there is an immense deal of flummery in Goethe, and in proportion to my own contact with him, a monstrous deal of it in me.[61]

Solomon "is the truest of all men" because he does not spread "flummery," the inauthentic expressions of the so-called proper digestion of personal experience. Solomon, too a Man of Sorrows, "sit[s] down on tombstones, and break[s] the green damp mould."[62] Melville in his letters during the composition of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is all the time bringing up Solomon and the mould. The man and the mould are a figure Melville cannot let go; with Solomon, he moves between thought and afterthought, but he never comes to resolution nor sublation. He sees and senses too profoundly the nature of living in a world that continually produces contradiction for any of that. He and Ishmael are stuck listening all the time to the irrational secret of the sea: the inscrutable tides of experience.

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Melville writes to Hawthorne in June of 1851 just before the publication of the book that would sink him:

> In a week or so, I go to New York, to bury myself in a third-story room, and work and slave on my "Whale" while it is driving through the press. *That* is the only way I can finish it now,—I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances. The calm, the coolness, the silent grass-growing mood in which a man *ought* always to compose,—that, I fear, can seldom be mine. Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar. My dear Sir, a presentiment is on me,—I shall at last be worn out and perish, like an old nutmeg-grater, grated to pieces by the constant attrition of the wood, that is, the nutmeg. What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,—it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches. I'm rather sore, perhaps, in this letter; but see my hand!—four blisters on this palm, made by hoes and hammers within the last few days. It is a rainy morning; so I am indoors, and all work suspended. I feel cheerfully disposed, and therefore I write a little bluely….
>
> But I was talking about the "Whale." As the fishermen say "he's in his flurry" when I left him some three weeks ago. I'm going to take him by his jaw, however, before

[61] Melville to Hawthorne, Early May 1851, 541.

[62] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

> long, and finish him up in some fashion or other. What's the use of elaborating what, in its very essence, is so short-lived as a modern book? Though I wrote the Gospels in this century, I should die in the gutter.—I talk all about myself, and this is selfishness and egotism. Granted. But how can I help it?[63]

The blisters Ishmael acquires on his hands as he works on the ship as it renders its oily product match those he makes with the pen dashing off pages of the book. The blisters are to some extent forced upon the man: he has no money and blisters he must bear for the three hundredth lay, granted he lives (and he barely does, to write a book that hardly makes him any money). The Man of Sorrows is the man who recognizes his scholarship, his poetry, all of his writing (and especially those parts that are unrecognized prophecies), may only come to traumatic self-doubt.[64] He slips into the gutter when he throws away any pretentions of literary fame.

The Lamp; or, Transubstantiation

Just before the "The Try-Works" and Ishmael's revelatory hallucination, is a chapter titled "The Cassock."[65] The blanket pieces ripped like an orange peel from the hunted sperm whale's body are cut further into smaller pieces called horse-pieces in the blubber room and hauled above decks.[66] The fire is started at the try-works. Another of the crew comes to dress in the turned inside-out pelt of the whale's phallus, which too has been cut away from the whale's corpse. Arms slipped through his uniform, "the mincer now stands before you invested in all the full canonicals of his calling."[67] He is to slice very thinly the horse-pieces passed up from

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[63] Melville to Hawthorne, Early May 1851, 539-540.

[64] cf. Emerson, "American Scholar," 22-24.

[65] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 324-325.

[66] Ishmael describes the process in the second section of "A Squeeze of the Hand." The scene of the blubber room, like the ship as it renders oil from the blubber, is one of horror. Once the try-works are fired, "the proper time arrives for cutting up its contents, [and] this apartment is a scene of terror to all tyros, especially by night," Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 324.

the blubber room. He does this "at a curious wooden horse… and with a capacious tub beneath it, into which the minced pieces drop, fast as sheets from a rapt orator's desk." He aims to slice the flesh as thin as "bible leaves," in order, as Ishmael explains in a footnote at the end of the chapter, to hasten the subsequent work at the try-works; for, "inasmuch as by so doing the business of boiling out the oil is much accelerated, and its quantity considerably increased, besides perhaps improving it in quality."[68]

The bible leaves are yet another step of an industrial, incremental transubstantiation. The bulky weight of the whale is reduced to oily slips (the whale becomes a book); the flesh is next burned away, leaving only oil; the oil is again burned another time to cast apparently immaterial light. From solid, to liquid, to something bodiless the whale is transformed; the body of the whale generates light. The bible leaves allude to almost an exactly similar process at work in *The Whale*. The bible leaves drop like pages from the desk of an orator in the pell-mell moment of creation (inspiration)—and pages of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* fall just as quickly. The book becomes *The Whale*, it changes from one substance to another, in part because Ishmael writes by the lamp-light, consuming the whale-oil: the light of the whale materializes in the body of the text—the book becomes a whale.

Ishmael's hallucination provokes an admonition against unnatural light that implicates books. The connection is not casual, not a clever game of parallelism and comparison. There is some more vital connection, and a more general one. The whale, as that thing from which the substance of light is produced, and *The Whale*, as another thing which under the light of

[67] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 325.

[68] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 325. The thin slices also went by the name of "books." cf. Putnam, "Whaling and Whalecraft," illustration of mincing knife, 454.

the lamp is produced, already refers to that implication. It is a connection that exists materially and figuratively in the world, in and at the body of the whale.

The Whale, as the labor of a scholar, invokes internally a similar process of transubstantiation. Something solidly concrete and in the world turns into immaterial stuff, experience into mental thought. The body of Ishmael lies at the beginning; the skeletal *Moby-Dick* written in the notebook is closest to his body and experience, but still it is a further step from the body itself. The memories have been gotten, put on a page, experience mediated by words and expressions. The blisters on the hands, the trauma in his head, and the emotions in his chest are the heavy, bodily origins of the thought and meaning contained by the marks on the pages of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*.

The passage from body to scholarship and poetry is similarly incremental, but perhaps less linear than whale-oil production, in the sense that Ishmael's method is reflexive and multivalent, hence, circular. In whatever form (scholarly, scientific, philosophical, dramatic) his mode-switching at the moment takes, his general method consciously intends and recognizes his own sort of scholarly and poetic transubstantiation. The book, Ishmael's project, though after all only a draught of a draught, unlike the work at the pots, has no definitive end. Though it is material, its substance is immaterial: images of the mind, thought, scientific abstraction. There is also a sense that Ishmael does not in fact write about himself; *The Whale*, more than *Moby-Dick*, speaks more to the question of knowledge than to the experience of the *Pequod*. Ishmael comments upon the world outside, and however slightly "fast" to the body of his experience, he produces a sort knowledge that is external, outside of himself.

This, at least, is a principle to which Ishmael can adhere. His is mediated world, a world of unbridgeable perspectives; he is a scholar who can feel the pressure of personal trauma—

more than thirty men are lost beneath Ishmael and the coffin, and a man who has lost a son[69] finds him. The truth of his experience is that it seems so horribly to happen for nothing, without any logic, a truth he must, in any case, represent. *The Whale*, as the light, tries to make something from the outside cohere, give it a certain intelligibility, clear and illuminated by attention, but at the same moment the thing *bends to* the light. Still, write about the world outside Ishmael must, for the sake of his own experience and the reader.[70] The scholar's transubstantiation turns the transubstantiation of the true Man of Sorrows upon its head: while the other takes the outside and gives it the character of the inside, Ishmael gives the inside as the outside.

Epilogue; or Traumatic Wavering.

Moby-Dick; or, The Whale as a work of art –a sort of encyclopedic collage– must get at a representation of contradictoriness, or, an aesthetic of the artificial fire at the try-works. The traumatic wavering of thought coincides with a way of writing that illuminates like the fire and the lamp, casting about beams of light and knowing its limits. The limits, folded into method, are like the surface of the ocean, which cannot be breached by the light. He knows he mediates the world for the patient reader. The light brings the dark world into some sort of understanding—"with books the same."[71] The ocean, whose surface makes two-thirds of all the surface of the earth, makes for a writer, if he really sees the ocean, who has more sorrow

[69] Emerson's motive for writing "Experience" was, in part, the death of his son. cf. Cameron, "Representing Greif," in *Impersonality*, 53-78.

[70] Ishmael is explicit on this point in "The Whiteness of the Whale," "It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me. But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught," Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 159.

[71] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

than joy in him; otherwise he "cannot be true, or" he is "undeveloped." Ishmael's sense of a true book is one written by an author who could "sit down on tomb-stones, and break the green damp mould with unfathomably wondrous Solomon."[72] Ishmael must represent experience as "faithfully" the fire represents the ocean—the fire instead of the sun because it illuminated the fissures of common reality, the nonsense. He more often writes by the lamp than by the sun. The fire leads Ishmael into the deeper darkness of the ocean, so the book and the fire must be circumscribed by a recognition of their unnatural connection on the basis of mediation.

It is as if Ishmael is still hallucinating when he speaks of this: he cannot hold a thought in this last metaphysical section of "The Try-Works." The wavering of thought is too much, from admonitions against the artificial fire, to reorientation to the glad sun, to the sun which does not hide the darker side of the world, to finally concluding "there is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness." Ishmael, orphaned after the disaster, wanders in some metaphysical landscape, trying to follow the line of *OR* from *The Whale* to *Moby-Dick*, without losing his mind.

He came to write the strange narrative of the *Pequod*, in other words, only after elaborating a more coherent understanding of the whale. The whale, Ishmael found, however, was just as inscrutable as Moby Dick: *The Whale* and *Moby-Dick* share the same inscrutability, irrationality, incoherence. Ishmael, though, at least makes his book readable, coherent in a very basic sense. His coherence is the "immediacy of the action… the unfurling of what appears to be an unmediated vision of the event."[73] Ishmael whenever he writes *The Whale* does not keep from mentioning the pen in his own hand, but as he writes *Moby-Dick* he drops out, making

[72] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 328.

[73] Fee, "Irreconcilable Difference," 145.

the past drama seem more present than Ishmael in the moment of composition (the true present). His tendency to appear and disappear is, too, a reflection of the weight of his traumatic experience: *The Whale* is far enough away, but *Moby-Dick* is still too close even some years later.[74] Ishmael as an author cultivates contradiction, fissures, disunity through "an effacement of the individual narrator-as-interpreter."[75] Ishmael as a scholar had recourse to oblique strategies of approach, but as a poet he had to engage altogether different means of coming back to experience.

The last sentences of "The Try-Works" betray the fact Ishmael is only paralyzed by his circumambulatory thoughts, as if Melville only reworded his letter to Hawthorne and included it in the book. Jonah, Ishmael, and Melville share the same paralysis:

> Screwed at its axis against the side, a swinging lamp slightly oscillates in Jonah's room; and the ship, heeling over towards the wharf with the weight of the last bales received, the lamp, flame and all, though in slight motion, still maintains a permanent obliquity with reference to the room; though, in truth, infallibly straight itself, it but made obvious the false, lying levels among which it hung. The lamp alarms and frightens Jonah; as lying in his berth his tormented eyes roll round the place, and this thus far successful fugitive finds no refuge for his restless glance. But that contradiction in the lamp more and more appals him. The floor, the ceiling, and the side, are all awry. 'Oh! so my conscience hangs in me!' he groans, 'straight upward, so it burns; but the chambers of my soul are all in crookedness!'[76]

The artificial light is too much for Ishmael; he fixates, even when Ahab is on the point of transfixing the crew with his harpoon tipped with the pallid, bluish flames of the corposants.[77]

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[74] cf. Fee, "Irreconcilable Differences," 143, "Ishmael's return to the past involves constructing a narrative of events he did not witness, reconstituting memories of events he did not understand… The truth Ishmael communicates is not primarily his account of the voyage, but his rendering of a narrative response to trauma… the fissures in the narrative do not obscure the story; they are the means by which the story can be understood." The effacement can be described, as well, in terms of the complications of agency, cf. Arac, "A Romantic Book," 46.

[75] Fee, "Irreconcilable Differences," 145.

[76] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 51.

[77] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 383.

Some idea of the mediations piled upon mediations of reality quickly loosens Ishmael's hold upon his experience. *Moby-Dick* gets away, slips past the harpoon hurled from the *The Whale*.

Ishmael, elsewhere, chases with greater efficiency and effectiveness. His approach, at these moments, is more indirect, less brutal than a metaphysical harpoon. The burning of whale oil extracted from a lifeless carcass illuminates what it can, but for any more Ishmael has to return to the body of the whale.

VI. Tattoo; or, Hieroglyphs. *The Third Day*.

Argument

Moby Dick and his resistance to capture provoke raw, religious obsession. Ahab's primary obsession with the White Whale –tangled up with a monomaniacal obsession with his own body– inspires Ishmael and the rest of the crew with a terror of the animal and a desire to dispatch it that mechanically reproduces Ahab's sultanism of the brain. Ahab's decision to heave the harpoon and set into motion the tragedy of the *Pequod* inspired Ishmael, years later, to write *Moby-Dick* with his own pointed instrument, but the mystery of Moby Dick first inspired *The Whale*. Threads and needles, labyrinthine lines and sharp points fill the objective world that confronts Ishmael: umbilical cords, hempen whale lines, monkey-ropes, the warp and woof, the wrinkles of Ahab's brow, the wrinkles of the whale's battering ram, waif poles, lances, harpoons, compass needles, all these Ishmael catalogues with the pen. Queequeg's skin and the whale's "blanket" carry hieroglyphics, markings of some ineffable (ungraspable, inexpressible) Truth, which Ishmael tries so mightily to get hold of. But it is not for the *Pequod* (the narrative of *Moby-Dick*) that Ishmael really first decides to tattoo himself—but for *The Whale*. He saves another part of himself, whatever not yet tattooed, for some symbolically condensed poem of *Moby-Dick*. Before the self-inscription (incorporation) of *Moby-Dick* Ishmael had to establish some link between his being and the being of the whale. He felt he must model himself (really a commitment to an intense and broad scholarly effort of research and action) after the whale before he could express the poem of his experience.

Umbilical Cords; or, Contradiction. A Momentary Glimpse of Secrets of the Deep, of Indecipherable Being.

The dream at the helm while the pagan harpooners fired the Try-Works was an intellectual crisis before the traumatic catastrophe of the final swallowing up of the *Pequod*. An altogether different sort of dreaminess set up Ishmael for his intellectual crisis, a dreaminess, too, connected to the violence of Ahab's final, suicidal act. The *Pequod* encountered a large school of whales as it sailed closer to the straits of Malacca, getting closer to Japanese cruising grounds in the Pacific where the ship would mount its final chase of Moby-Dick. The crew spot "broad on both bows, at the distance of some two or three miles, and forming a great semicircle, embracing one half of the level horizon, a continuous chain of whale-jets," progressing through the strait ahead of the *Pequod*.[1] It is "The Grand Armada," the "vast fleet of whales… hurrying forward through the straits; gradually contracting the wings of their semicircle, and swimming on, in one solid, but still concentric circle."[2] Malay pirates, as the ship passes through the strait after the schools, chase the *Pequod* (Ahab does not let the significance of this inversion of chase pass without thought), until the one quickly leaves the other behind while the whales gain some further distance on the whaler. Each boat is quickly lowered from the ship; each crew pulls for hours until finally the "caravan" is "*gallied*," into a disorganized panic.[3] The boats separate to pick out some whale or other on the outer circumference of the panic. Using the druggs,[4] the boats harpoon two or three whales apart

[1] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 298.

[2] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 299.

[3] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 300. cf. Ishmael's footnote to the word.

[4] cf. Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 301.

from the one to which they are already attached by the whale line: there is a possibility for extremely fruitful carnage.

A whale pulls Starbuck's boat into the circle of the panic, striking for the center of the school. But the panic gives way to a strange inner "prairie-like placidity."[5] Ishmael, an oarsman in the boat, launches into his usual commentaries:

> Now, inclusive of the occasional wide intervals between the revolving outer circles, and inclusive of the spaces between the various pods in any one of those circles, the entire area at his juncture, embraced by the whole multitude, must have contained at least two or three square miles. At any rate—though indeed such a test at such a time might be deceptive—spoutings might be discovered from our low boat that seemed playing up almost from the rim of the horizon. I mention this circumstance, because, as if the cows and calves had been purposefully locked up in this innermost fold; and as if the wide extent of the herd had hitherto prevented them from learning the precise cause of its stopping; or, possibly, being so young, unsophisticated, and every way innocent and inexperienced; however it may have been, these smaller whales—now and then visiting our becalmed boat from the margin of the lake—evinced a wonderful fearlessness and confidence, or else a still, becharmed panic which it was impossible not to marvel at. Like household dogs they came snuffling around us, right up to our gunwales, and touching them; till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly domesticated them. Queequeg patted their foreheads; Starbuck scratched their backs with his lance; but fearful of the consequences, for the time refrained from darting it.[6]

Ishmael suggests the inner fold of cows and calves are systematically kept at the core of the armada, but the bigger whales who keep them tucked in have not communicated the reason for their arrest. The spoutings at the edge only communicate to the inexperienced whales to keep to the middle, and that Ishmael conceives of sentient whale communication is no surprise: two chapters earlier he lays out his hypothesis that the sperm whale's spouting is but the signal of deep thought.[7] There is some hint, now, to Ishmael, surveying the placidity and the panic, that "incommunicable contemplations"[8] signaled by the spouting have become the direct and

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[5] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 266. Ishmael originally uses the phrase to refer to the Sperm whale's brow, a creature that thinks with a characteristic "speculative indifference."

[6] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 302.

[7] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 293.

[8] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 293.

intelligible communication between distant whales, so that the inner group stay put without question—the whale speaks and thinks in the same breath.

The young Ishmael –that is, not the particular Ishmael who writes years later– had up to this point only familiarized himself with the whale and the "inherent dignity and sublimity of the Sperm Whale" through routine, commercial (if romantic-heroic) slaughter.[9] The young, amateur whaleman finally sees the creature of Job and Jonah rolling over playfully, rather than rolling over in a death flurry. The contradiction of a developing metaphysic is too great, insofar as Ishmael years later obliquely narrativizes the younger Ishmael's nascent obsession with leviathan. Ishmael in that precise moment, head swimming with a profound and novel experience, finally realizes: this whale I confessedly admire, I see him better when I do not hunt. Ishmael catches a glimpse of the sort of communication he would later research and set to words in a book, all of this when the boat makes no aggression. It is an intellectual crisis that lays the seeds for one more serious at the Try-Works: the honor and glory of whaling are compromised, though the young Ishmael is not yet quite aware of the great contradiction of his experience. He cannot distinguish domestication from a whale simply being naturally a whale, in such a mood because it is not being chased (nor have these been hardened from ever being chased).

The contradiction becomes concrete as Ishmael's gaze moves towards the surface of the water. He does not see himself, but rather the whale in a more natural state, though his eyes cannot penetrate very far into the deep. The dimly felt contradiction coalesces around the umbilical cords that attach a mother to her child:

> But far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still stranger world met our eyes as we gazed over the side. For, suspended in those watery vaults, floated the forms of the

[9] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 292. cf. Scott, "Whale Oil Culture," 6-13.

> nursing mothers of the whales, and those that by their enormous girth seemed shortly to become mothers. The lake, as I have hinted, was to a considerable depth exceedingly transparent….
>
> "Line! line!" cried Queequeg, looking over the gunwale; "him fast! him fast!—Who line him! Who struck?—Two whale; one big, one little!"
>
> "What ails ye, man?" cried Starbuck.
>
> "Look-e here," said Queequeg pointing down.
>
> As when the stricken whale, that from the tub had reeled out hundreds of fathoms of rope; as, after deep sounding, he floats up again, and shows the slackened curling line buoyantly rising and spiraling towards the air; so now, Starbuck saw long coils of the umbilical cord of Madame Leviathan, by which the young cub seemed still tethered to its dam. Not seldom in the rapid vicissitudes of the chase, this natural line, with the maternal end loose, becomes entangled with the hempen one, so that the cub is thereby trapped. Some of the subtlest secrets of the seas seemed divulged to us in this enchanted pond. We saw young Leviathan amours in the deep.[10]

The cord of life by which the mother pulls the infant that naturally draws nearer replaces the cord of death by which the whale boat pulls the whale that runs away. And the substitution precipitates a constellation of symbols that reconfigure this original, subtle hint of a secret kept in the vault (the deep). Even more, the whale line –the, as yet, only form of communication between whaler and whale for the young Ishmael– often violates the umbilical cords, disrupting communication between the two whale, disrupting the activity of organic life.

The organic life of the whale is, however, in the end, the ultimate object of Ishmael's cetological interrogations. Relentlessly he complains that he goes but skin deep, he cannot penetrate the surface of the water to dive into unfathomable depths, research is dangerous; he investigates contorted and lifeless corpses, sorry sites for the production of Truth.[11] The umbilical cord was, at least, a starting place for research; the spoutings at the edge of the armada occasion a quick hypothesis that eventually becomes the text of "The Fountain." The spouting, even if as indecipherable as the line of communication carried along the umbilical cord, is, though, secondary to later aggregations of symbolic content that take a form comparable to the umbilical cord. After the disaster of the *Pequod*, Ishmael returns to the cords

[10] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 303.

[11] cf. Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 217-218; 262; 275; 262; 296; 347-348.

and like reconfigurations as a point of study of a more general natural science of the whale. The concrete investigations eventually make space for a language of their own—his scholarship induces artistic (poetic) labor, another example of a turn about the *OR* axis from *Moby-Dick* to *The Whale* and back again.

Ishmael's cetological enterprises, that is, excite "the enfolding imagination of the narrator which sets and defines the symbolic mode that pervades the entire book."[12] Research and scholarship facilitate the Ishmael's poetic method to essentially "[set] the symbolic as the primary mode of self-examination and communication."[13] It is important to realize that each symbol grows organically from elaborated facts,[14] and each fact grows organically from Ishmael's experience: it is all a play of organic and reinforcing commentary, either scholarly, poetic, reflexive, or some combination of the three. The original and intense scholarly interrogation of the object (the umbilical cord and its cognates) in the first place locks it into a specialized cetological vocabulary, so that it acquires some symbolic valence, which Ishmael subsequently refines through "a complex web of meanings which cannot easily be reduced to paraphrase and are not finally statable in other than their own terms."[15]

Ishmael's scholarly effort as such has a distinct language for the different "lines" it encounters in the memory of Ishmael's experience recorded in *Moby-Dick.* Any discussion of

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[12] Bezanson, "*Moby-Dick*: Work of Art," 650. He writes in the previous paragraph, "the persistent tendency in *Moby-Dick* is for facts, events, and images to become symbols."

[13] Bezanson, "*Moby-Dick*: Work of Art," 650.

[14] cf. Bezanson, "*Moby-Dick*: Work of Art," 650, "most commonly the symbols begin with a generative object… the symbolic events begin with a chance incident." Both are the case for the scene in the middle of "The Grand Armada." The original experience is significant for "the truth of the thing" Melville described to Dana in May of 1850. In other words, the reality of Ishmael's experience was necessary for the structural integrity of the book, so that "fancy" would not get the better of Melville, as it seemed to do in *Mardi.* Bezanson, then, seems correct in his assessment that "Both [generative objects and chance incidences] give the tale solidity, for the objects and events are objects and events before they become meanings," 650.

[15] Bezanson, "*Moby-Dick*: Work of Art," 650.

those "lines" is delegated to the terms of that distinct language that eventually straddles scholarly and poetic modes of expression, but there is also a primary delegation because the original fact is an indecipherable secret. The constellation of "line" symbols is, in other words, described by a unique language that already recognizes a primary mystery and always reproduces circular investigations of "lines" in the very same language. This is the kernel of Ishmael's conscious scholarly-poetic logic of deferral. Deleuze describes the logic of this always-already circularity of deferral as a paradoxical logic of unreason, of mystery. The primary mystery retains its shape, and "things remain enigmatic yet nonarbitrary: in short, a new logic, definitely a logic, but one that grasps the innermost depths of life and death without leading us back to reason."[16] Ishmael pushes the language as far as it can go, only he knows more than he did in the middle of the whale armada: he cannot damage the umbilical cord with inked lines of thought darted by a sharp pen.[17]

Fast-Fish and Loose Fish; or, Preliminary Investigations of the Lines.

Only two chapters after the scenes narrated in "The Grand Armada," Ishmael outlines an important juridical principle in the labor of whaling. Ishmael means to clear up the universally recognized signification of the waif pole stuck upright into the whale's floating corpse after its capture.[18] The code is:

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[16] Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, The Formula," in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 82; cf. comments on the birth of the American novel, Deleuze, "Bartleby," 81; also, Arac, *Commissioned Spirits*, 34-35. Arac develops here his argument of the shared figure of synecdoche in Melville's and Dicken's writings as a point of useful comparison, noting that Ishmael's constant effort to metonymize the whale ship (it is the same for the whale) facilitates the evolution of broader constellations of metaphor.

[17] Bezanson describes the usual result, which is explored in this chapter: "in his intense effort to explain himself, [the narrator] resorts to a brief passage in which there is a flashing concentration of symbols that hold for a moment and then disappear," "*Moby-Dick*: Work of Art," 651.

> I. A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it.
> II. A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it.[19]

Ishmael, proper to his commitment to scholarship and to his function as whale man, comments on the very simple principle; he is, by the end of his commentary, guilty of the mischief of interpretation. The experience in the core of the whale pod a few pages before, however, provokes a radical and caustic amendment to the "vast volumes of commentaries [deployed] to expound [the masterly code]."[20]

The code is one of possession and of what can be possessed at some point in time, but it also describes both the medium of communication between the whaleman, the whale, and other whalemen. The principle of Fast-Fish, Loose-Fish, in other words, illustrates the fundamental relationship between man and whale, insofar as Ishmael is speaking of the labor of whaling. The whale line attached to the end of the harpoon is the medium of communication between man and whale and what, in the first place, establishes the relationship between the two in most circumstances. The waif is in a sense only the whale line foreshortened and abstracted in order to signal the whale line that sometime before connected the whale and the whale boat.

The whale line is obviously no umbilical cord. The cord is organic, a tether that communicates something of a shared being or life, while the former is matter-of-fact and only

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[18] Ishmael makes first mention of the waif in the closing paragraphs of "The Grand Armada," 305. Much like the pen –and there is some resonance between pen and pennon, a word Ishmael writes to describe the thing–, it is a pole at the top of which is attached a small flag. It is another (and necessarily interpretable) symbol in the language carved out by the whale line. cf. Berninghausen, "Writing on the Body," 6.

Though I do not discuss it here, there is another symbolic resonance: between the flag of the waif and the flag Tashtego hammers to the main mast of the *Pequod* in the final chapter (in each instance an animal is detained and killed, the whale and the sea-hawk).

[19] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 308.

[20] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 308.

signifies a calculated relation of possession. The whaleman[21] sees the whale as first an object he exploits if he can only master the creature, even if he knows of Jonah and Job (through Father Mapple), or has an experience such as Ishmael, or sees in the whale a terrible malignancy (Ahab). And the whaleman cannot help from being as matter-of-fact as the whale line most of the time, because to think as Ishmael thinks is to be caught in a horrible contradiction.

Ishmael's first experience with the living whale (he must have encountered the dead whale in the lamp long before going a-whaling) was couched in the language of the whale line. The line was a starting point, a medium that facilitated the utterance of the first words in his dictionary of the whale and later symbolic abstractions (*The Whale*). Ishmael, in the course of anatomizing the whale ship, early describes the whale line: it is Manilla rope of fifty-one yarns –each strand can "suspend a weight of one hundred and twelve pounds"– and it "measures something over two hundred fathoms"—twelve hundred feet.[22] The whale line communicates to Ishmael some calculable idea of the strength the whale and the depth to which the whale can dive. The line is, however, not exact, because it does not really estimate the true depth of the whale's dive. The end of the line is kept free and unattached, should the boat need the line of another (twenty-four hundred feet, almost a half-mile), or the whale run out the line in a lightening instant.[23] Hence, Ishmael knows something of the whale's speed as well, by the line.

[21] I mean more specifically a regular, subaltern member of the crew, like Ishmael on this particular voyage. I do not mean, either, to represent the whaleman as a simple man, without much interior life, but rather that the influence of the whale line (i.e. the environment of the commercial practice of whaling) upon the whaleman. The whale line structures the relationship; it is a matter-of-fact default.

[22] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 227.

[23] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 228.

The purpose of the whale line, however, is to keep the whale on the surface, a fast-fish meant to be mastered and possessed. The umbilical cords, however, signaled the possibility of a very different relation to the whale, one of mystery, but of life too. The older Ishmael finally elects the cords over the line, the secret over deadened matter-of-fact; the contradiction dimly felt in The Grand Armada is developed into an oblique criticism of the industry. The criticism is careful, for Ishmael does not really resolve the contradiction.[24] He contradicts himself because he will not openly contradict the honor and glory of whaling, though his self-contradiction leads him to be "always a bit apart, unwilling or unable to give his full assent to the madness of the quest."[25] Ishmael, in any case, knows he must engage another vocabulary because it is impossible to actually possess the whale. The cords between mother whale and infant whale hold a secret that cannot be recovered by the same tired, cynical logic of power and possession, of masters and slaves, of, fundamentally, exploitation and potential exploitations:

> What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish? What all men's minds and opinions but Loose-Fish? What is the principle of religious belief in them but a Loose-Fish? What to the ostentatious smuggling of verbalists are the thoughts of thinkers but Loose-Fish? What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish? And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?[26]

The reader: Fast because we are seduced like the crew into *Moby-Dick*, Loose because *The Whale* sets out another language, another vital constellation of knowledge about the whale. It is another, richer, more mysterious Looseness.

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[24] Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 20-23.

[25] George Cotkin, *Dive Deeper: Journeys with* Moby-Dick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 166. Cotkin describes Ishmael's aversion to a total assent to Ahab's quest through a comparison with the Kid in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*; the American whaling industry, too, conceived itself as a quest, another frontier story. cf. Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 11-15, namely his notion of SPACE.

[26] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 310.

The Dart: or, the Tools of Inscription, Chirography

Attached at the other end of the whale line is the harpoon, the weapon of capture that solidifies the communication between ordinary whaleman and whale. The harpooneer fills a special role: he makes the first physical contact with the whale, or he at least attempts it, so it is he who "makes the voyage" of three or four years.[27] The harpoon is a special object, with a definite symbolic and personal meaning. Queequeg carries his own almost everywhere; Ahab tempers the barb of the harpoon meant for Moby Dick, cast of "the gathered nail-stubbs of the steel shoes of racing horses," using Pagan blood.[28] The harpoon is the primary tool for inscription upon the body of the whale, inscriptions, that is, of possession. The waif is a secondary tool, a substitute that outlines a (legalistic) commentary upon the original harpoon. Ishmael's pen is at yet another remove, and it is unfortunate that it should reproduce the form of the harpoon and the waif, for he tries to inscribe his project outside the discourse of harpoon and whale line.[29]

Ahab baptized the harpoon in pagan blood and feverishly intones, "ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!"[30]—I do not baptize in the name of the father, but in the name of the devil. Melville wrote Hawthorne in June the year he finally published his whale book, "this is the book's motto (the secret one),—Ego non baptiso te in nomine—but make the

[27] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 233.

[28] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 371-372.

[29] The symbolic coincidence of harpoon, the waif, the lance, other instruments of the whale ship and the pen is a common trope in criticism on the book. cf. Berninghausen, "Writing on the Body," 5-12; Beachy-Quick, "Inscribe," "Line," "Writing," in *A Whaler's Dictionary*, 137-140, 164-167, 315-318; Gasché, "The Scene of Writing," 150-171; Larson, "Of Blood and Words," 18-33; Slattery, "Watery World/Watery Words," 62-66. cf. pp. 45 of Cartography.

[30] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 372.

rest out for yourself."[31] In some ways the two, Melville and Ahab, coincide in their intentions: they deride economic prerogatives (the rules of the father), and rather madly, megalomaniacally, pursue personal prerogatives (the freedom of the devil). Melville's harpoon (a pen driven by the motto), however, really participates in another sort of relation, because he does not aim to kill, but to represent Truth. Melville forges Ishmael's pen, and he writes *Moby-Dick* and *The Whale*: the pen spreads, has more breadth than Ahab's harpoon.[32] Only, still, Ishmael must be careful with his tools, so that he may not unfaithfully –forcefully– bring the whale to the surface and thereby relinquish Truth. He must redraw the whale line as umbilical cords in order to recover "covertly, and by snatches" the secret as best he can.

The Blanket; or, the Indecipherable Scores upon the Body of the Whale.

The harpoon, should it land correctly, penetrates the hump of the Sperm Whale in the course of the chase. The object of the chase is, among other things, the whale's blubber, continuous with the hump, which is peeled from the dead corpse of the whale like an orange.[33] Ishmael takes a closer look at the blanket, a large strip of the blubber cut from the corpse, in order to speculate on the question of the whale's skin. He, in his speculations, resuscitates a crucial anatomical discussion held among the representatives of the field of cetology (whalemen and naturalists) to argue the blubber is, in fact, the whale's skin. The argument is, however, somewhat immaterial to his primary interest in certain, inscrutable markings on the blubber-skin of the whale:

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[31] Melville to Hawthorne, 29 June 1851, 542.

[32] cf. Olson, "A Moby-Dick Manuscript," in *Call Me Ishmael*, 52-58.

[33] cf. "Cutting In," Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 244-245.

> In life, the visible surface of the Sperm Whale is not the least among the many marvels he presents. Almost invariably it is all over obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in thick array, something like those in the finest Italian line engravings. But these marks do not seem to be impressed upon the isinglass substance above mentioned, but seem to be seen through it, as if they were engraved upon the body itself. Nor is this all. In some instances, to the quick, observant eye, those linear marks, as in a veritable engraving, but afford the ground for far other delineations. These are hieroglyphical; that is, if you call those mysterious cyphers on the walls of pyramids hieroglyphics, then that is the proper word to use in the present connexion. By my retentive memory of the hieroglyphics upon one Sperm Whale in particular, I was much struck with a plate representing the old Indian characters chiselled on the famous hieroglyphic palisades on the banks of the Upper Mississippi. Like those mystic rocks, too, the mystic-marked whale remains undecipherable.[34]

The whale must come into the world, still attached to his mother at the cord, already bearing the hieroglyphical markings. The markings are another organic fact Ishmael cannot directly read, and cataloged in Ishmael's growing constellation of image and symbol. The whaleman suggests the hieroglyphics are, like any fact, intelligible markings, but he has no Rosetta stone for even the sloppy work of translation. One whale, however, should be able to read the markings of another, using the isinglass substance, like Ishmael, "to read about whales through their own spectacles."[35] The markings are a language, scored on the whale during the long, gestating moments of creation spent in the watery womb world of the mother whale. Ishmael finds in the hieroglyphics some hint in the language another set of secrets –"far other delineations"– comparable to those felt in the middle of the Grand Armada. The umbilical cords and the markings, two modes of communication without sound but only ever understood by creatures that can sound, share the same indecipherability. Ishmael's only recourse is try to read and to write with his own pen, to a symbolic constellation located somewhere between

[34] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 246.

[35] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 245. Ishmael notes the dried isinglass has a slight magnifying effect. The idea is the whale cannot possibly wear spectacles because of the position of his eyes, so the spectacles are displaced onto the body of the other.

the markings of his pen and the markings upon the body of the whale, reinforced by an organic logic of research and representation.[36]

So Ishmael begins, at the skin, to draw out an anatomy of the whale, only his tools to start out with are of the whale ship and the vocabulary of the whale man (blanket for blubber). Ishmael dives but to a very shallow depth; sometimes he extends his reach by an inconsequential two hundred fathoms (the whale line) dropped into "unfathomable waters,"[37] but he knows he must be careful with the instruments of whaling. Ishmael's observation, his research, his project to develop a whale's language are all caught in the same methodological bind: he knows the whale only because he is a whaleman. The labor of whaling is, inevitably, his only way into a novel organic relation to the whale and it is, unhappily, the best method of contact. He is forthright:

> For all these reasons, then, any way you may look at it, you must needs conclude that the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last. True, one portrait may hit the mark much nearer than another, but none can hit it with any very considerable degree of exactness. So there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like. And the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself; but by so doing, you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him. Wherefore, it seems to me you had best not be too fastidious in your curiosity touching this Leviathan.[38]

Ishmael mentions elsewhere the dilemma of cetological research:

> How vain and foolish, then, thought I, for timid untraveled man to try to comprehend aright this wondrous whale, but merely poring over his dead attenuated skeleton, stretched in this peaceful wood. No. Only in the heart of quickest perils; only when within the eddying of his angry flukes; only on the profound unbounded sea, can the fully invested whale be truly and livingly found out.[39]

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[36] "Out of the trunk, the branches grow; out of them, the twigs. So, in productive subjects, grow the chapters," Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 234. cf. M. H. Abrams, "Coleridge's Mechanical Fancy and Organic Imagination," and "Coleridge and the Aesthetics of Organism," in *The Mirror and The Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 167-177, and 218-225.

[37] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 217.

[38] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 218.

[39] Meliville, *Moby-Dick*, 348.

The two problems–*observing* the *living* whale; *deadly* business of *observation*–are really one, namely the life of the whaler and the whale are fundamentally opposed to one another. The two may not live, so to speak, side-by-side ("The Grand Armada" was only a special circumstance of mutual self-preservation). The phrase "by the effort to describe the body, we place its being in jeopardy," acquires a new, saturated significance (the movement from self-relation to relation between self and other).[40] The whaleman and the whale coincide only where one is dead and the other alive (the chase is not dialectic—there exist few possibilities for sublation or synthesis). It is either Ahab or Moby Dick.

Ishmael, a whaleman aware of his own intellectual contradiction as a scholar, attempts to inhabit another space of observation and research, although he consistently and unsurprisingly "encounters a curious caesura within the figures of his thought."[41] The only available means to observe the whale, in "living contour," was to go a-whaling; the caesura is a consequence of the contradiction in which Ishmael finds himself as a scholar. It, as a matter of course, forces Ishmael to recognize "the knotty issue of his representational scope," both as a scholar *and* a poet.[42] He is whale man, restricted to a certain depth, to particular limits of knowledge; he cannot read Queequeg or Tashtego or Daggoo because he is from New York,[43] and he cannot read the whale because he is a whale man.

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[40] Larson, "Of Blood and Words," 18.

[41] Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 128. cf. Larson, "Of Blood and Words," 19, "What I want to propose in this essay is that in *Moby-Dick* there is no unequivocal prioritization of such questions. I want to look at how the text plays out–and is largely constructed around–the radical differences between one character and another's grasp of the body as trope: a trope whose variations dwell precisely in a shifting relationship between identity and interpretation, between the physical body and figural language."

[42] Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 123.

[43] cf. Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 127-136.

Ishmael is, however, inventive.[44] He does not invent the life of the pagan or the whale, but rather reinvents the existing language: whale's umbilical cords are graphed onto the whale line, and the blanket (blubber) is graphed onto a blanket (a fabric). They are each an instance of writing scholarship in the terms of symbolic interrogation. Ishmael works around the methodological caesura by a curious symbolic substitution: the blanket is something that keeps one warm, like the blubber of the whale, and the substitution goes further. The blanket is another generative object, in the sense that Ishmael identifies a prerogative to keep himself warm, like the whale, in order to approximate the life of the whale. Ishmael's scholarship is useful (meaningful) so long as the whale man learns to be in some ways like the whale:

> It does seem to me, that herein we see the rare virtue of a strong individual vitality, and the rare virtue of thick walls, and the rare virtue of interior spaciousness. Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice. Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter's, and like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own.[45]

Such is Ishmael's work around. He does not exactly enter into, Deleuze points out, a "relation of identification," but rather "a slippage, an extreme proximity, and absolute contiguity; not a natural filiation, but an unnatural alliance."[46] Ishmael, in other words, can never not be a whale man, an enemy of the whale. The opposition, nevertheless, yields contact, hence the possibility of "an unnatural alliance," as in "The Grand Armada." The blanket hangs before the young

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[44] cf. Emerson, "The American Scholar," 18.

[45] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 247.

[46] Deleuze, "Bartleby," 76, 78. cf. Cameron, "Representing Grief," 78, "Thus although Emerson in 'Experience' disavows spacializations that depend on ideas of integration, he relies on spatializations that depend on ideas of proximity." Deleuze describes Melville's characteristic decision to privilege proximity over identification or integration as a consequence of the rejection of the so-called paternal function that in the first place inspires – in the son – imitative identification—with the father; cf. Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 82.

Ishmael on the *Pequod* and it says to him, like the older whale man lowering the suspended forehead of the whale in front of the reader, "read it if you can."[47]

Tattoo; or, Self-inscribing a Secret Still Not Divulged.

Ishmael, closed up within himself, in the cold winter of Cape Cod, must share a bed with another man, a harpooneer, "dark complexioned," for his stay at the Spouter-Inn of New Bedford.[48] Already the schoolmaster is uneasy, but he agrees after useless attempts to talk with the landlord about the harpooneer; he takes half the bed in spite of his inhibition. Ishmael finally walks up to the room to lay down, get ready for sleep, though the harpooneer has not yet returned. He is curious: he looks through the harpooneer's things, tries on a poncho-doormat sort of garment, he steps to see his reflection. Ishmael admits, looking at himself, "I never saw such a sight in my life. I tore myself out of it in such a hurry that I gave myself a kink in the neck."[49] He terrifies himself with his own appearance, exchanging his coat for the poncho. Queequeg comes into the room sometime after Ishmael has laid down in the bed; his tattoos attract immediate attention and a similar terror:

> Such a face! It was of a dark, purpulish, yellow color, here and there stuck over with large, blackish looking squares…. I remembered a story of a white man—a whaleman too—who, falling among the cannibals, had been tattooed by them. I concluded that this harpooneer, in the course of his distant voyages, must have met with a similar adventure. And what is it, thought I, after all! It's only his outside; a man can be honest in any sort of skin….
>
> Meanwhile, he continued the business of undressing, and at last showed his chest and arms. As I live, these covered parts of him were checkered by the same squares as his face; his back, too, was all over the same dark squares… still more, his very legs were marked, as if a parcel of dark green frogs were running up the trunks of young palms. It was quite plain that he must be some abominable savage or other shipped aboard a whaleman in the South Seas, and so landed in this Christian country. I quaked to think of it."[50]

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[47] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 275.

[48] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 33.

[49] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 33.

[50] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 33-34.

The tattoos are, at first, incidental to the fact that Ishmael knows what to expect of a white bedfellow. Queequeg discloses further, hidden markings upon his body and Ishmael "quakes"—he can expect nothing of a foreign cannibal.[51] Ishmael's curiosity, though, does not attenuate even as his horror quickens. Later Ishmael's prudishness subsides and the two are bosom friends.

* * * * *

Ishmael represents himself as he was some years before writing *The Whale* on few occasions in *Moby-Dick*. It was, for the older whale man, difficult to carry out the narrative business of dressing up as the younger Ishmael: Ixion's dizziness rushes back too quickly because he is too close to raw trauma. There are, however, a few uncomplicated moments in which he could avoid the storminess of post-traumatic stress[52]—precisely the moments his subject matter is not Ahab, and Ishmael remembers another sort of vital relation to a different sort of object. Examples of the latter are Queequeg and the whale;[53] the reader catches a glimpse of young Ishmael on land with his friend, or in the Grand Armada with the whales. Otherwise Ishmael hides Ishmael, and the younger whaleman recedes from the drama, falling into line as another member of the crew of the *Pequod*.[54] The drama, however, parallels a

[51] Frankel takes this fact to be, fundamentally, an explanation of Ishmael's narrative authority over the text: he can represent Ahab and the mates without much difficulty, but the whale and the harpooneers are external to that authority. He cannot faithfully approximate their experience nor thought. cf. Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 127-132.

[52] Some moments are unavoidable: the crisis at the helm during "The Try-Works," and the "Epilogue," among others. These are, of course, very scarce.

[53] Frankel makes a similar argument in order to establish Ishmael as the unequivocal narrator of Melville's book; cf. Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 122-125. My argument here is different: Ishmael comes out of hiding whenever he has the chance to elaborate his own, particular "whale language," apart from the language of whaling that contradicts the former.

[54] There are other moments, on occasion, when Ishmael refers to himself (as a younger man) in an indirect way, as in "The Mast-Head," or "The Pacific," or similar chapters when it is clear Ishmael writes almost totally from a memory, unmediated by his dramatic form, of the calm expansiveness of the ocean. It also true, however, that

distinct, simultaneous project: an accumulation of reappearing symbols, a subsequent arrangement of those symbols into a web, a symbolic constellation. Ishmael shows himself, young and old, in any instant another image, trait, object, fact is set into the constellation because its construction relies upon an organic logic based upon an experience with some aspect of the symbol. The logic is, in other words, vital and personal. Ishmael writes in the last chapters of *The Whale* grouping, "But how now, Ishmael? How is it, that you, a mere oarsman in the fishery, pretend to know aught about the subterranean parts of the whale?... Explain thyself, Ishmael."[55]

* * * * *

Queequeg and the whale share a distinct characteristic: markings on the body, indecipherable and intelligible secrets of the Truth. Ishmael, in his rambling researches on the whale, gathering notes for *The Whale*, "was invited to spend part of the Arsacidean holidays with the lord of Tranque, at his retired palm villa at Pupella."[56] The villa happened to house a full-sized skeleton of the Sperm Whale, the last anatomical detail of the whale Ishmael had yet to draw out in *The Whale*. The priests for Tranquo (the lord) converted the structure into a chapel; the skull, the primary compartment of the chapel, housed "an unextinguished aromatic flame, so that the mystic head again sent forth its vapory spout," and the "vertebræ were carved with Arsacidean annals."[57] The whale's skull usurps Father Mapple's whale ship pulpit, and the hieroglyphics the marble tablets that commemorate the deaths of bodiless whalemen.

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these memories of a "Magian rover" intensify the movements of Ahab's tragedy; cf. Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 66-69.

[55] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 344.

[56] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 344.

[57] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 345.

Ishmael walks through the skeletal structure with the aim of measuring the skeleton, a final piece in his physiologically oriented interrogations of the dimensions of the whale (these, later, give clues for the investigations of altogether different cetological dimensions—the concrete fact, the measurements, are a necessary first operation).

Ishmael, however, is without his usual scholarly instruments, the pen and paper. He, as usual, innovates, alters his scholarly methods:

> The skeletal dimensions I shall now proceed to set down are copied verbatim from my right arm, where I had them tattooed; as in my wild wanderings at that period, there was no other secure way of preserving such valuable statistics. But as I was crowded for space, and wished the other parts of my body to remain a blank page for a poem I was then composing—at least, what untattooed parts might remain—I did not trouble myself with the odd inches; nor, indeed, should inches at all enter into a congenial admeasurement of the whale.[58]

The needle is a pen and the paper is Ishmael's skin. But his anatomy of the whale begins at the skin to arrive, finally, at the skeleton. The whale scholar, in other words, penetrates to the very innermost makeup of the whale. Ishmael's sketch is "a large and thorough sweeping comprehension of him" –the whale– yet he is oddly dissatisfied.[59] Ishmael writes elsewhere, before he communicates these skeletal dimensions, "dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will."[60] He is to some extent literal: he dissected the whale, reached the absolute inside, but the tattoo (a marker of his experience) is an inked marking that goes only skin deep. The dictionary, language, constellation built from the image of the whale were, after all, in the first place predicated on the fundamental mystery of the whale, sidelongingly (paradoxically) developed through a whaler's vocabulary.

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[58] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 346-347.

[59] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 344.

[60] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 296.

Ishmael does not mention, however, that his decision to self-inscribe the admeasurements of the whale is also a participatory act. The tattoo of these measurements, even if they are the secondary scholarly efforts to get at Truth, reproduce to some extent the mystery of the whale: Ishmael's tattoo graphs onto the Arsacidean hieroglyphics carved on the spine, the markings engraved on the blanket, the tattoos that cover Queequeg's body, and vice versa (an internal logic of Ishmael's symbolic constellation). The tattoo is another expression of Ishmael's advocacy in "The Blanket," for "strong individual vitality," "thick walls," and "interior spaciousness." Frankel suggests that "more than simply returning from his vacation to the Arsacides physically changed, Ishmael is fact has begun to imagine himself becoming whale."[61]

Frankel's framing of the communicative bond of the tattoo as a figure of becoming rather than of absolute identification is critical. Ishmael catalogues an immense cache of symbols, "amassing information at the beginning in order to give the whale a form and sketch out its image," but the cache eventually secures its own space, an independence as a constellation "devoid of a center." The details of the whale's anatomy are reworked, "as if the traits of expression escaped form."[62] A whaleman's subjectivity, caught in a contradiction such as Ishmael, is destabilized and "loses its texture in favor of an infinitely proliferating patchwork," quilted loosely together from traits which had been severed from their original character.[63] The patchwork (interchangeable with the term "constellation") is the product of

[61] Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 124.

[62] Deleuze, "Bartleby," 77. Such an independence of the trait is the basis for what Deleuze calls "the new identification in the New World: the Trait, the Zone, and the Function," 78.

[63] Deleuze, "Bartleby," 77. Deleuze speaks here of "something that blurs the image, marks it with an essential uncertainty, keeps the form from 'taking,' but also undoes the subject, sets it adrift and abolishes any paternal function…. The paternal function is dropped in favor of even more obscure and ambiguous forces.… [A characteristic of the father, then,] functions as a trait of expression that emancipates itself, and is just as capable

Ishmael's labor as scholar of the whale; a scholar can no more be a whale and the whale no more a scholar, but the scholar must also recognize the prerogatives of his methodology and findings. Ishmael is not seduced into an identification, an emulation of the whale (his methods are contrary to it), but he cannot pretend, either, that he can investigate totally as a whaleman. The original, undivulged secret of the umbilical cords is not so easily uncovered. The space of symbols, however, is an apt ground for investigation; hence, Ishmael tattoos himself.

Incorporation; or, a Whale Author

Ishmael finally reveals the meaning of Queequeg's tattoos as the pagan swings in his death-hammock, ill from over-exertion and exposure to the damp mold of the *Pequod*'s hold. The harpooneer demands a coffin be made and brought to him. The request is respected and Queequeg outfits the coffin for his soon to arrive death; he lies down in the box in order to make sure the thing will be adequate or no. Lying in the coffin he says, " 'Rarmai' (it will do; it is easy)."[64]

The harpooneer, however, decides against death—"at a critical moment, he had just recalled a little duty ashore, which he was leaving undone; and therefore had changed his mind about dying."[65] So Queequeg appropriates

> his coffin for a sea-chest; and emptying into it his canvas bag of clothes, set them in order there. Many spare hours he spent, in carving the lid with all manner of grotesque figures and drawings; and it seemed that hereby he was striving, in his rude way, to copy parts of the twisted tattooing on his body. And his tattooing, had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own

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of undoing resemblance as it is of making the subject vacillate… a trait of expression that contaminates everything, escaping linguistic form and stripping the father of his exemplary speech, just as it strips the son of his ability to reproduce or copy."

[64] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 363-365.

[65] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 366.

> proper person was riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last.[66]

The body of Queequeg is a book; the whale is classified according to book size; the blubber is cut into bible leaves; Ishmael tattoos Melville's whale book on his body. The "poem" Ishmael says "he was at the time composing" is presumably the text of *Moby-Dick* set to a distinct hieroglyphic protocol modeled after the variety of hieroglyphical languages that coincidentally appear and reappear in Ishmael's world. Out of the symbolic constellation, Ishmael has finally constructed his own language, no less intelligible and no less indecipherable—to reduce *Moby-Dick* is to condense his experience to symbols that even Ishmael cannot wrap his head around. Ishmael realizes the mystery, even, of his own experience; the only recourse, after the pen, is to hieroglyphics, and to inscribe them upon his body. On his right arm is, likewise, the tattooed text (a culmination) of *The Whale*, without which either tattoo loses its key to meaningfulness.[67] Meaningfulness, however, does not undo the mystery: there is signification, but a lack of explanation, of absolute analysis.

The tattoo, in other words, reproduces the fundamental quandary of the scholar, a problem of knowledge, of epistemological limits. The symbolic objects and images that Ishmael over the course of the book aggregates, assimilates, and constructs into an intelligible

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[66] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 367.

[67] cf. Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 117, "For Deleuze, this 'calling' expressly involves the work of art between two mutually contingent passages. In one, a lived '*sensation is realized in the material,*" marking the object's legibility as a record of a particular 'state of affairs,' and elaboration of certain 'systems of coordinates,' and a staging of various 'referential propositions.'[3] These constitutive dimensions of science for Deleuze both structure the material object and in turn render it available for certain interpretative techniques. Yet in another passage, it is '*the material that passes into sensation*' (*WP*, 193), a reanimation of the work in which its technical inscriptions open onto another plane of composition. The work of art thus compounds a real power, provoking actual and virtual aesthetic encounters with the novel across different contexts of reception and prompting what Deleuze practices as a 'clinical' evaluation of the work's 'vitality.'[4]"

constellation is always haunted by an epistemological blank, a gap in vision like the space between the two eyes of the whale ("the whale, therefore, must see on distinct picture one this side, and another distinct picture on that side; while all between must be profound darkness and nothingness to him").[68] Deleuze characterizes Ishmael as one of his category of

> a third type of character in Melville, the one on the side of the Law, the guardian of the divine and human laws of secondary nature: the prophet… all have this power to "See": they are capable of grasping and understanding, as much as is possible, the beings of Primary Nature, the great monomaniacal demons or the saintly innocents, and sometimes both…. They are nonetheless representatives of secondary nature and its laws… they are Witnesses, narrators, interpreters.[69]

Deleuze, however, forgets that Ishmael instrumentalizes "Primary Nature" for his cetological interrogations—Ishmael is much closer to the Outside, to the blankness, to unreason than Deleuze suggests. Ishmael is, of course, not Ahab, but his tattoo is too intimate a "proximity" to the Outside to name Ishmael and the attorney of "Bartleby" in the same breath. Deleuze is closer to the mark at the end of his characterization of the prophet: "in the end, even prophets are only the Castaways of reason: if Vere, Ishmael, or the attorney clings so tightly to the debris of reason, whose integrity they try so hard to restore, it is because they have *seen* so much, and because what they have seen has marked them forever."[70] The hieroglyphical tattoo of *Moby-Dick* forever afterwards marks Ishmael with the profound irrationality of its content. Ishmael, still, does not cling to reason, but to the coffin-life-buoy, inscrutable mysteries of life and Truth carved onto its sides.

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[68] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 262-263.

[69] Deleuze, "Bartleby," 80-81.

[70] Deleuze, "Bartleby," 82.

Ishmael and his scholarship let unreason, those deep and indecipherable profundities exist as such. It is an inevitable consequence of his commitment to Truth, and a hallmark of both his scholarship and his poetry. The two –scholarship and poetry– come together because they share the same foundation (spelled out by Emerson), coalescing as a work of art, and Ishmael is its author, an artist (scholar-poet). Melville, in the disguise of Ishmael, elaborates a language that, for the book as a whole, is a symptom of "psychosis," which "brings into play a *procedure* that treats and ordinary language, a standard language, in a manner that makes it 'render' an original and unknown language… it is the OUTLANDISH or Deterritorialized, the language of the Whale"—the hieroglyphical tattoo.[71] Really, the "*procedure*" gets down to the interruption of speech, in order to properly recognize epistemological limits. Ishmael does not proffer an absolute interpretation of the whale, just as Ishmael eventually refrains from an "attempt to supplant Queequeg's occluded interiority."[72] Ishmael, rather, opts for what Frankel, borrowing from Deleuze, calls a "vital topology"[73] that characterizes the aesthetic geography of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. Ishmael's method is, in part, the conscious decision of an artist to represent "the truth of thing" without damaging a stronger, hidden Truth.

The tattooed poem and measurements were a decision made along the same line of reasoning: *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is left open (Ishmael cannot say all), while the tattoo is closed, but cannot be read. Ishmael finally includes himself, incorporates himself into his own symbolic constellation because he marked the history of that constellation onto his own body. Ishmael's tattoo is the absolute concrete materialization of the notion, "a great book is always

[71] Deleuze, "Bartleby," 72.

[72] Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 132.

[73] Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 134-137.

the inverse of another book that could only be written in the soul, with silence and blood."[74] Ishmael admits he cannot adequately describe Queequeg, "for whatever is truly wondrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books."[75] What is wondrous about Queequeg?: he decides to live. Ishmael's tattoo is, too, a decision to live: Ishmael commissions the tattoo because he cannot speak it. It?: the original mystery of Narcissus, the ungraspable phantom experiences of a Life.

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An Arsacidean priest of the whale's skull finishes Ishmael's tattoo. The whaleman looks at himself in a pool of pure spring water kept for ritual purposes in order to look at the priest's work on his body. He turns to the priest and says, "Rarmai" (it will do; it is easy). The priest replies, "Rarmai."

[74] Deleuze, "Bartleby," 72. Frankel provides additional commentary, "Ishmael's tattoo is both at once, work of art, and monument of human struggle, kept in what is the 'strictest and… most mysterious relation.' But in that mystery is the struggle for as-yet-unthought-of forms of self-creation and new varieties of human and nonhuman encountering, and aesthetic composition, we might say, of subjectivation and solidarity," "Tattoo Art," 142.

[75] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 364.

VII. Epilogue. *Ixion, Nth day*

Coincidence; or, Another Ixion.

It is a funny thing: I write now with some urgency, in a second floor bedroom of my father's house. I've taken the room to spend a concentrated two weeks writing the thing, wrestling with this project, attempting to make it cohere into some comprehensible form even though I feel the weight of its endlessness (a feeling of possibilities, not of boredom). I have been between other sorts of tasks: homework for class, routine assignments, fifteen hours a week in a warehouse and another ten at home to earn some cash, and all of the other errands of life (car repairs, cooking, cleaning, and the rest of those daily motions that prime routine). Between all of these I found time for thinking about *Moby-Dick*, even though in my mind I have given this project a priority higher than the others. There has not been enough time to read all that I want, and I do not stop from discovering new processes of writing that I cannot retroactively engage. I feel I am in Melville's position: I am caught in-between, and the other things do not give me the time for the labor I really want to perform. My situation is of course in no ways as desperate: I am not in the moment of composing a very great book, nor have I made a change of location in the middle of writing, nor, luckily, have I accumulated the same sort of debt Melville did while he wrote a book he suspected was an unsellable botch. I can only indirectly imagine the tautness of his nerves, the pressure of his anxiety, while I write all of this at an age that he did not count as important to his development as a thinking man.

But I cannot help but make the analogy: we experience a similar sort of regret at the compression of time and a fundamental insecurity with our project about the whale. To finish, I have to shut myself up in an upper room that has a circular window set between the slants of

a gable, a room that only poorly approximates the primitive simplicity of a typical garret apartment room rented by some miserable writer. I, still, cannot deny this feeling of novelty that Melville, too, had to get away from his recently purchased home in the Massachusetts Berkshires in order to finally complete his whale book in his brother Allan's New York apartment.[1] In my own scholarly effort here I have, in the same spirit of coincidence, attempted to reproduce Ishmael's (Melville's) method. I must admit too, as Ishmael in "Cetology," that the chapters do not stop here, at the epilogue. Sections, amendments, further chapters are left open because I understand the great inexhaustibility of experience with and of commentary upon *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (a metacritical, second order to Ishmael's admission of never-ending deferral), even as the Sperm Whale today swims on the cusp of extinction.

But, maybe, precisely the whale's literary survival is the subtext of Ishmael's late apology for the whaling industry, "Does the Whale's Magnitude Diminish?—Will He Perish?," rather than the concrete possibility of the whale's extinction. Ishmael in a sense creates the whale and sets his creation before us (he resorts to creation because, on the one hand, he wants to keep his personality, and on the other, he cannot possibly reproduce the whale, as the whale is). That second-order whale has not ever perished, and ostensibly it never will as long as the book is read. We often cannot keep our attention from Ahab, but Ishmael is sure to worm *The Whale* into our attention to the pages of the book as a whole, so that the whale inevitably makes its way into our memory of the book. There is an odd moment when Melville and Ishmael bleed together (the one as a writer, the other as a writer), the chapter before the one on the whale's magnitude, "The Fossil Whale," consciously ejaculating about their writerly power to secure the whale's survival:

[1] Melville to Hawthorne, Early May 1851, 539.

> From his mighty bulk the whale affords a most congenial theme whereon to enlarge, amplify, and generally expatiate. Would you, you could not compress him. By good rights he should only be treated of in imperial folio….
>
> Since I have undertaken to manhandle this Leviathan, it behooves me to approve myself omnisciently exhaustive in the enterprise; not overlooking the minutest seminal germs of his blood, and spinning him out to the uttermust coil of his bowls. Having already described him in most of his present habitatory and anatomical peculiarities, it now remains to magnify him in an archæological, fossiliferous, and antediluvian point of view. Applied to any other creature than the Leviathan—to an ant or a flea—such portly terms might justly be deemed unwarrantably grandiloquent. But when Leviathan is the text, the case is altered. Fain am I to stagger to this emprise under the weightiest words of the dictionary….
>
> One often hears of writers that rise and swell with their subject, though it may seem but an ordinary one. How, then, with me, writing of this Leviathan? Unconsciously my chirography expands into placard capitals. Give me a condor's quill! Give me Vesuvius' crater for and inkstand! Friends, hold my arms! For in the mere act of penning my thoughts of this Leviathan, they weary me, and make me faint with their outreaching comprehensiveness of sweep, as if to include the whole circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding its suburbs. Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and liberal theme! We expand to its bulk. To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be written on the flea, though many there be who have tried it.[2]

The extravagance, I think, is deserved, and well earned. Melville, Ishmael, offer a very unique experience, if one but listens. Bezanson said it another way: "for the good reader the experience of *Moby-Dick* is a participation in the act of creation."[3]

Self-aware extravagance only seems to appear in these last two chapters of *The Whale* grouping, and still Ishmael recognizes the limits of his scholarship. In other words, he must defend whaling, which means he must, in some oblique and glancing way, also defend Ahab, who helped to create the world of *Moby-Dick*. The terms of the chase, however, threaten the extinction of the very object Ishmael has created and set before the reader. Whaling was the only available avenue of real and meaningful research; he contends the very terms of the hunt do not really endanger the whale –"the far different nature of the whale-hunt peremptorily forbids so inglorious an end to the Leviathan"– and this is the essence of his apology.[4] The

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[2] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 348-349.

[3] Bezanson, "Work of Art," 656.

[4] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 353.

whale, in other words, actually *secures his own immortality*[5] because the whale can dive to depths the whaleman can never possibly go. The whale escapes. It is the same with *The Whale* for the reader, a concession Ishmael must make in his apology. Hence the whale, *The Whale*, is always available to a never ending inquiry, studies of a primary mystery, that only ever get more personal. A reader like Ahab, who reads the Sphynx,[6] more and more frustrates himself into endlessly provoked deferrals. The reader lisps, "speak, thou vast and venerable head… not one syllable is thine."

SPACE;[7] *or, Democracy in America*

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in the margin of his manuscript of *Democracy in America* a half-formed and cryptic note: "the Americans have only two means to gain the truth, the *voice* of foreigners and *experience*."[8] The sentence is nearly impenetrable, though less so after reading Emerson and Melville (and their advocate, Matthiessen). Emerson and Melville sing the song of (personal) experience, the song being the only way out of the crushing pressures of the contemporary American political and social milieu against the personality (freedom) of expression. Or, to be more specific: the American literary scene. Tocqueville, a foreigner, explains those pressures for us, the Americans:

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[5] Ishmael concludes his apology, "Wherefore, for all these things, we account the whale immortal in his species, however perishable his individuality. He swam the seas before the continents broke water; he once swam over the site of the Tuileries, and Windsor Castle, and the Kremlin. In Noah's flood he despised Noah's Ark; and if ever the world is to be again flooded, like the Netherlands, to kill off its rats, then the eternal whale will still survive, and rearing upon the top-most crest of the equatorial flood, spout his frothed defiance to the skies," Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 354.

[6] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 248.

[7] I borrow the term from Olson, cf. *Call Me Ishmael*, 11-15.

[8] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Volume 2*, trans. James T. Schleifer, ed. Eduardo Nolla (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 422.

> In America, the majority draws a formidable circle around thought. Within these limits, the writer is free; but woe to him if he dares to go beyond them. It isn't that he had to fear an auto-da-fé, but he is exposed to all types of distasteful things and to everyday persecutions…. He gives in; finally, under the daily effort, he yields and returns to silence, as though he felt remorse for having told the truth…. the democratic republics of today have made violence as entirely intellectual as the human will that it wants to constrain.[9]

Our culture brought about a particular consequence, namely the impossibility for a unique American "literary genius,"[10] speaking for American experience(s). Melville was, for nearly ten years, exclusively a literary man, a "commissioned spirit"[11] who had consciously recognized and taken up his commission to articulate the social fabric of the United States. The history of *Moby-Dick* and Melville after publishing the book are well known—he gave up his commission.

The "courtier spirit" was all too strong and had far too great a reach; the minute Melville, first with *Mardi* and then with *Moby-Dick*, stepped outside the "formidable circle," he met the righteous reproaches of the courtier.[12] Tocqueville was not entirely correct when he said the writer need not really fear an auto-de-fé; Melville clearly felt himself a victim (for the victims he wrote *The Confidence Man*). Democracy is sometimes overzealous. But, it is not as if Melville were ever really surprised (*Mardi* eliminated any illusions), though he had to feel, at moments, that his labor on *Moby-Dick* could not go unrecognized. He knew he wrote a great

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[9] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 418.

[10] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 419.

[11] cf. Arac, Preface and Introduction to *Commissioned Spirits*, ix-xi, 1-12. Emerson in his conclusion to "The American Scholar" writes, "One of these signs is the fact that the same movement which effected the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the state, assumed in literature a very marked and as benign an aspect. Instead of the sublime and beautiful, the near, the low, the common, was explored and poeticized. That which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time."

[12] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 421. cf. Parker, *Herman Melville, 2*, 1-30, for American reception of the book, which really only reproduced English critical reviews of *Moby-Dick*. The Boston newspapers set the tone for the majority, and most others afterwards spoke accordingly (in line with the majority).

book, for he had a mighty theme, and had mightily handled it. "Hawthorne and His Mosses," apart from being an outline of Melville's aesthetic and a defense of American literature, also had to be a manifesto of Melville's irresponsible, latent hope for the possibility of American democracy. *Moby-Dick*, however, does not keep from revealing the foul underside of democracy; the whale-ship is a paradigm: "a whaleship reminded Melville of two things: (1) democracy had not rid itself of overlords; (2) the common man, however free, leans on the leader, the leader, however dedicated, leans on a straw," Olson argues. The poet's criticism of the book depends on the fact, which is really an elaborated articulation of the idea: democracy "EQUALS" tragedy.[13]

Emerson gave his "American Scholar" address at the same time Tocqueville was writing and publishing his work in France. Emerson's words are the words of an American—he is far more urgent. He demands of his listeners the labor that is necessary for carrying out the very important function of *Man Thinking*. (Man, for Emerson, can only be himself when he thinks for himself, and the same for the young country.) The error of optimism is often charged against Emerson, but at least with "The American Scholar" the charge is misplaced. Emerson expresses a certain hopefulness because he, like Melville, must, on the one hand, cultivate a real enthusiasm for an American scholarship, poetry, literature, and on the other, because he has some idea of the concrete means for its cultivation (labor). Nonetheless, Emerson is practical, truthful when he describes what will come of his scholar:

> But he, in his private observatory, cataloguing obscure and nebulous stars of human mind, which as yet no man has thought of as such,–watching days and months sometimes for a few facts; correcting still his old record;–must relinquish display and immediate fame. In the long period of his preparation he must betray often an ignorance and shiftlessness in popular arts, incurring the disdain of the able who should him aside. Long he must stammer his speech; often forego the living for the dead. Worse yet, he must accept–how often!–poverty and solitude. For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road, accepting the fashions, the education, the religion of society, he takes the cross of making his own, and, of course, the self-accusation, the faint

[13] Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 64-65.

> heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time, which are the nettles and tangling vines in the way of self-relying and self-directed; and the state of virtual hostility in which he seems to stand to society, and especially to educated society.[14]

Remember he speaks of the American Scholar; "society" is American society. It is an acknowledgement of the truth of Tocqueville's assessment.

Melville was caught in an uncomfortable, contradictory position. He confessed an undeniable and radical belief in (American) democracy over the months he composed *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. In "Hawthorne and his Mosses" he writes, "we should… duly recognize the meritorious writers that are our own;—those writers, who breathe that unshackled, democratic spirit of Christianity in all things";[15] in *Moby-Dick*, "thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end form God… against all mortal critics bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind";[16] in letters to Hawthorne, "it seems an inconsistency to assert unconditional democracy in all things, and yet confess a dislike to all mankind—in the mass."[17] Intellectual violence could not, however, really damage Emerson's scholarship and Truth in the end; Melville persisted, at least while he wrote his whale book, in the belief of a democratic and personal literature that, too, was uniquely American. Tocqueville, Emerson, Melville all consistently engage the same language—of telling the truth.

Melville's truth, because of his hopes for democracy, was also possibility, possibility wrested from the fact Ahab is *of a world much richer than the one he had created for himself*

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[14] Emerson, "American Scholar," 22-23.

[15] Melville, "Hawthorne and his Mosses," 527. He continues, "

[16] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 103-104.

[17] Melville to Hawthorne, Early May 1851, 539.

and the Pequod. Olson calls this possibility "the *Moby-Dick* universe,"[18] and Deleuze frames it in terms of "the Trait, the Zone, and the Function."[19] The point is that Ishmael "creates for himself and us a new context… a context to his experiences on that blank-faced body of water that rolls on and over all that takes place on the surface," and in so doing truth and possibility are twisted together.[20] The story of Ahab is true (*Moby-Dick*), but so is the story of the whale and of the ship (*The Whale*), and, even more, it is *The Whale* that proffers real possibility. The tragedy and death of Ahab lead Ishmael into a new relation to the whale and to the crew, one much more personal, more democratic. Ahab and Moby Dick often, however, seize more space than Ishmael gives them, and *The Whale*, beneath the surface, is sometimes lost. And so, another error of literary criticism is committed, a much more innocent error, but an error that lines up with Tocqueville's analysis of American democracy. *The Whale* is, *still*, too strange to get any real attention.

Read it if you can; or, Scholarship

A professor of an American Renaissance class originally defined the nascent terms for this project, both in method and in vocabulary. This all happened something like two years ago. I read *Moby-Dick* for the second time in the class and for the final assignment I submitted a more creative, personal essay that attempted to outline an argument for the urgent need to alter the forms (formulas) of academic, critical discourse, while I attempted to write in a way (i.e. a performative argument) that would reproduce older, essayistic styles of literary criticism that

[18] Olson, *Call Me Ishmael*, 45.

[19] Deleuze, "Bartleby," 78.

[20] Slattery, "Watery World/Watery Words," 62-63.

were my examples of a freer and more provoking mode of writing. Emerson, Brooks, and Margaret Fuller were all the specific patterns of expression that influenced this previous project (titled, "Schools and Schoolmasters; or, Anxieties Over Graduate School"). The objective of the project really referred to a discussion the professor had always attempted to include whenever we extended any particular analysis of a text, namely a discussion concerning personal relevance, vital connections to literature on a very intimate level of engagement.[21] The discourse of relevance was something that became for me, very quickly into a concrete and real objective; as I saw it, only when the object of research had some bearing on life in the present did scholarship really accomplish anything *in the present*. Powerful scholarship is not written from some tired, passionless impetus unnaturally, inorganically, forced from without. Scholarship, in its best moments, is somewhat of an aesthetic experience—Ishmael, at least, teaches us as much, and Emerson makes his argument on these terms.

The *Moby-Dick* universe is one in which relevance may be cultivated on a grand scale. Like Hawthorne into Melville, Ishmael drops "germinous seeds into" the reader's "soul."[22] But there is a problem in the routine critical protocol (in the profession or in the class-room) used whenever *Moby-Dick* is read: it is clear enough that contemporary criticism insists upon reproducing the same inability to consider *The Whale*, Ishmael's scholarship, on its own terms, an attitude apparent even in the original reception of the book. The fact is particularly ironic when we finally get around to understanding that Ishmael in the book (that has been the object

[21] Parker writes, "the obligation to be professional extends equally to teachers, writers, and teacher-writers, with this added burden on the teacher – the urgent responsibility to convey a passionate love of literature as well as scholarly and critical knowledge about it," "Being Professional," 192. The professor, I think, adeptly met Parker's obligation; he no longer teaches at the university, but at a middle school, but with the same aim—the language of relevance.

[22] Melville, "Hawthorne and his Mosses," 529.

of voluminous critical commentary) demonstrates his own methods of research. *The Whale* is unfocused, scattered, contradictory, generically unintelligible, but it is also an example of the creative power of scholarship written, in the first instance, from deeply personal ambitions.

There is a problem of both reading and writing. Scholarship in the classroom is often locked into the standard reading, so the question of personal relevance is squeezed out by routine. Melville wrote *Moby-Dick* with a "just Spirit of Equality" and "bound to carry republican progressiveness into Literature," but we do not read with a similar democratic spirit of reading.[23] Much of the labor of Melville and *Moby-Dick* scholarship has been, it seems, to hierarchize modes of writing and subject matter, thereby leaving behind Melville's attempt to represent all things in the book with a certain artistic view to equality. Ishmael, moreover, writes about the whale in precisely the way he wants to (against the grain of formula), which is not to say Ishmael's scholarship is immature, inauthentic, sloppy, or cheaply and carelessly written. His research is in no wise lacking, he betrays an internal logic to his scholarship, and he is consistently self-critical.

Ishmael excavates the *Moby-Dick* universe in large part through interrogations of the whale, through the symbolic constellations that yield the lamp-light and the tattoo, and a variety of others. The complexity and breadth of those interrogations make Ishmael's world a viable one; in other words, "Ishmael is an exemplary reader who adjusts his outlook and behavior based on experiences and reflections, while Ahab represents a failed reader who cannot change his behavior."[24] Ishmael's world is one of "symbolic potentialities" that opens

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[23] cf. Frankel, "Tattoo Art," 142, "Again Deleuze: 'There is no work of art that does not appeal to a people who do not yet exist' (*WP*, 176, 177). In this sense, Matthiessen was correct in identifying what he saw as the democratic urge of the 'common reader' to read books 'because they have an immediate life of their own.' Reading *Moby-Dick* for the sake of its art, admiring its vitality, even modeling its tattooed marks, we are always that common people—not yet in existence, but struggling to become."

[24] Colatrella, "*Moby-Dick's* Lessons," 167.

possibilities for understanding the complex density of experience.[25] The scholar of *Moby-Dick* should labor in this world of Ishmael's, recognize possibilities where they may appear (*The Whale* and *Moby-Dick*) and with equality. There is no point in *Moby-Dick* that does not have a compliment in *The Whale*, and vice versa. The nature of the whole, something more than the two simply linked together by an insignificant conjunction, is otherwise unavailable to literary critical study. And like Ishmael, to find something in *The Whale* is to find something within oneself—we imagine, trace out upon our own bodies the tattooed poem of *Moby-Dick* by the light of *The Whale*.

[25] Bezanson, "Work of Art," 651. Like Colatrella, Bezanson sees the fundamental difference between the shared sensitivities of Ahab and Ishmael as one of close reading: "Yet the tragedy of Ahab is not his great gift for symbolic perception, but his abandonment of it. Ahab increasingly reduces all pluralities to the singular. His unilateral reading of events and things becomes the narrow translation in the imperative mood. Unlike young Ishmael, who is equal in sensitivity but his inferior in will and authority, Ahab walls off his receptiveness to the complexities of experience, replacing 'could be' or 'might be' with 'must.' His destruction follows when he substitutes an allegorical fixation for the world of symbolic potentialities."

Postscript:

And this thought it must have been which suggested to Ahab that wild exclamation of his, when one morning turning away from surveying poor Queequeg—"Oh, devilish tantalization of the gods!"

—from "Queequeg in his Coffin"

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